

COMMUNITY-WIDE PANEL,
New York, N.Y., July 18, 1968.

Re employment stability in the building industry.

Congressman ELMER J. HOLLAND,
Chairman, Select Subcommittee on Labor,
House Office Building, Washington, D.C.

DEAR SIR: The Community Wide Panel was formed at the end of 1966 and has as its members citizens throughout the greater New York area drawn from all backgrounds. The Panel was set up by persons who had been on both sides of the 1966 dispute here over the Complaint Civilian Police Review Board. It was felt that the energy displayed by the parties, all of whom were interested in fair and effective law enforcement, could be brought to bear on many other problems facing the metropolitan area. As a result, a number of committees were formed and much active work has been undertaken.

Obviously, the rebuilding of the central city is a crucial area and one of the problems is, of course, stability in employment, not merely across the construction season, which I understand is the subject of the recent hearing, but on a longer term basis as well. I am accordingly enclosing, in triplicate, pursuant to a discussion with Congressman O'Hara's office, the Panel's report, "To Break The Housing Bottleneck", together with letters of approval from both the labor and management sides of the building industry, for inclusion in the sub-committee record. I also enclose an article by Richards A. Givens, Esq. from the August 1967 issue of the Labor Law Journal, on this subject which I hope you and your staff will find helpful. Mr. Givens, a member of the Community Wide Panel, is Chairman of the Committee on Federal Legislation of the New York State Bar Association.

Yours very truly,

MARK K. BENENSON.

COMMUNITY-WIDE PANEL REPORT: "TO BREAK THE HOUSING BOTTLENECK"

Inadequate housing in our central cities continues to be a source of intolerable blight. It provides fuel for urban violence and contributes to the spread of decay in widening areas. Despite decades of effort, a breakthrough toward decent housing for all at costs within their reach has yet to be made.

At the same time, unemployment continues to remain high in the building industry. Even skilled workmen often have only intermittent and seasonal employment in many areas, while the less skilled or older employee has slimmer pickings. For this reason building trades employees under present conditions are entirely justified in resisting technological changes which could otherwise help to lower the cost of housing. An employee cannot be blamed for refusing to assist in use of methods which may put him out of a job without assurance of other equally well paying work. For the same reason, scarcity of jobs intensifies clashes among differing groups over those jobs which are available. The needs of urban minorities for jobs in rebuilding their own areas runs head-on into the problem of job insecurity for existing workers in the industry as long as underemployment and job insecurity continue.

In order to deal with job insecurity, end urban blight on the scale urgently required and make possible the ultimate lowering of building costs and extension of job opportunity, we propose that Congress appropriate adequate funds in advance for the rebuilding of the central cities of the nation over a 10 year period, such funds to be voted in the first year and to remain available until expended. There is no constitutional obstacle to this procedure. The Constitution limits the length of appropriations only in the case of funds for armies, and that to two years. Indeed the Demonstration Cities Act passed in 1966 contains a provision that funds under it remain available until expended. We are merely suggesting a bolder implementation of that principle on the scale required by the urgencies of today. As was said more than 100 years ago, "... the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present." The procedure of limiting housing funds to year-to-year uncertainty will no longer do in the last third of the twentieth century.

On the basis of such known availability of funds, contractors engaged to rebuild parts of a city under private enterprise could be asked as a condition to use of federal funds to engage employees on a long-term basis as executives are now employed in many fields. It might then become possible for labor and management to negotiate for payment of an annual salary in return for work