

Public housing suit tentatively settled

City-ACLU accord would give thousand rental certificates

A chance at better homes

Baltimore County executive vows to try to halt agreement

By JOANNA DAEMMRICH
SUN STAFF

Baltimore and the American Civil Liberties Union have come up with a far-reaching agreement to break up the segregation of black families in public housing projects by giving thousands a chance to move to more affluent, largely white neighborhoods throughout the region.

A proposed settlement of a class-action lawsuit, which charged the city and federal governments with a 60-year history of segregation in public housing, would give rental certificates to 1,342 families — about 4,000 people — to move out of the poor neighborhoods that ring downtown Baltimore.

Reaction to the agreement was swift from Baltimore County Executive C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger III, who vowed to try to stop it.

Baltimore already has demolished the first of its four high-rise complexes and plans to tear down the others in the next few years. The ACLU, acting on behalf of public housing residents, asked a federal court in February to stop the city from replacing the high-rise developments with new segregated pockets of poverty.

But ACLU lawyers and top city officials now have reached a tentative settlement that calls for giving half of the 2,700 tenants from the four high-rise developments a chance to live elsewhere. They would be offered federal certificates to rent private apartments and homes — but not in poor and minority neighborhoods.

If approved by lawyers for the U.S. (See Sulf, 13A)



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Yes: Housing chief Daniel P. Henson III says "mobility strategies" work elsewhere.



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No: C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger III says relocations would hurt his county.

City, ACLU reach tentative settlement of public housing lawsuit

(Suit, from Page 1A)

Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. District Judge Marvin J. Garbis, the settlement would allow the city to proceed with plans to redevelop Lafayette Courts, a dilapidated complex on the east side that was leveled in August, and Lexington Terrace, which is to be torn down in the spring.

The main goal of the settlement is to break up the nearly all-black concentrations of poverty around downtown Baltimore — which the ACLU contends the government deliberately created and perpetuated through "systemic racial segregation."

Not all families would be relocated to the suburbs. The settlement would allow the city to rebuild 636 of the 2,729 residences at Lafayette Courts, Flag House Courts, Lexington Terrace and Murphy Homes. Another 300 families would move to older neighborhoods such as Sandtown-Winchester, which is undergoing a much-heralded revitalization.

The immediate effect would be to put to rest a preliminary injunction sought by the ACLU that would have prevented the city from rebuilding the sites of the demolished high-rises.

However, the settlement does not cover allegations of segregation in 8,600 residences in low-rise public housing and some 2,800 scattered units.

Both sides stressed last night that the settlement represented a middle ground.

"The settlement is a compromise," said Deborah S. Byrnes, a lawyer for the city. "Some people will move away and some people will move back."

Stuart Comstock-Gay, executive director of the Maryland ACLU, agreed: "It's a blended settlement. It's not all one thing or the other."

For the 1,342 public housing families who would get rental certificates that could be worth up to \$9.4 million a year for the next 15 years, HUD is setting up a \$2 million program to provide counseling on housing, jobs, schools and transportation, according to a draft of the settlement.

Rental restrictions require that families find housing in integrated or mostly white neighborhoods. Because the federal rental subsidies would be limited for use in

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C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger III, Baltimore County executive.

"areas of low minority and poverty concentration," the options in the city would be neighborhoods such as Lauraville, Gardenville and Hamilton. Many tenants are expected to move to the suburbs.

Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke alerted Maryland's delegation to Congress and the county executives of the four neighboring suburbs this week of the pending settlement. Mr. Schmoke declined to comment yesterday on the agreement until it is approved.

It swiftly kindled a raging political debate in the surrounding counties. Several county executives worried about a lack of low-

income housing for suburban residents, let alone an influx of poor families from the city.

An indignant Mr. Ruppertsberger banged his fingers on a conference table and said, "I resent that very, very much. This is the thanks I get from the mayor for all I've tried to do for the city."

Mr. Ruppertsberger, who has championed regional cooperation among governments, said the county would suffer from the relocation of hundreds of families from Baltimore public housing projects. Most would move into the older county communities, such as Riverdale, Tall Trees and

Chesapeake Village instead of Ruxton or Glyndon, because that is where landlords accept Section 8 rental certificates, he said.

"Federal officials are coming in once again and dictating the quality of life in our older communities," he said. "I will do everything in my power to see it doesn't happen again."

Baltimore Housing Commissioner Daniel P. Henson III, however, said "mobility strategies" for relocating residents from public housing high-rises have worked in several other cities, such as Chicago, and could work here with the help of counselors and the cooperation of surrounding jurisdictions.

"I can't solve Mr. Ruppertsberger's problem on this, but if officials would sit down at the table, we can work something out," Mr. Henson said.

Mr. Henson plans to meet soon with housing officials in surrounding areas and seek their direction in helping avoid relocating residents to neighborhoods with high

concentrations of poverty.

"It's the key to making this work," he said.

In Howard and Anne Arundel counties, local officials were adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

"Details are rather sketchy right now," said Howard County Executive Charles I. Ecker.

Anne Arundel County Executive John G. Gary expressed his support of the city, but also was concerned that the area did not have enough job training programs or public transportation.

"Mr. Gary is supportive of the city and the situation and the problems the city face," said Lisa Ritter, a spokeswoman for the county executive. "His concern is that you simply don't just give people a new home to start over with. We don't know where we would put them yet. We would have to see what kind of infrastructure they would need."

Annapolis Alderman Carl O. Snowden, a civil rights activist who participated in some of the discussions on the ACLU suit over the past eight months, said he expects an outcry similar to that over the federal Moving to Opportunity program last year.

The federal voucher program helped 285 Baltimore families move from public housing into better neighborhoods and the

suburbs. But it ignited furious opposition in eastern Baltimore County, which doomed a planned expansion.

While saying he understood the ACLU's goals to provide more housing choices for the poor and disperse poverty in the metropolitan region, Mr. Snowden said: "I think generally the climate is so polarized at this point that it's fair to say that in the counties, people will not be welcoming those leaving the city with open arms."

Mayor Schmoke and Mr. Henson, while criticizing the suit, have hinted before that a federal court order forcing the suburbs to provide housing for Baltimore's poor would be to their liking.

More than 90 percent of Baltimore's public housing families are black. Many of the tenants are single mothers of young children living on about \$5,000 a year.

Residents of Lafayette Courts were relocated mostly to other public housing developments and to renovated homes in areas such as Sandtown-Winchester. Under the proposed agreement, some 380 families living in the four high-rise developments would move into Sandtown-Winchester, East Baltimore and other communities in the midst of urban renewal programs. The city plans to renovate some of the hundreds of vacant, boarded homes in the neighborhoods for public housing.

Sun staff writers Eric Stegel, Patrick Gilbert, Ivan Penn and Kris Antonelli contributed to this article.