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County housing agency is helping local residents

In response to "County makes lousy landlord" (May 3):

For 69 years, the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino (HACSB) has provided affordable housing to hundreds of thousands of residents throughout the county and has infused millions of dollars into the local economy as a housing developer. Even though HACSB is a public agency, we are not part of the county government entities, but proudly serve the county's residents in providing affordable housing.

HACSB ventured into purchasing both Virginia Village and Scenic View Apartment, both foreclosed properties, to avoid these areas becoming blighted and forcing existing residents to move from their homes. There is no intention to turn these properties into public housing or section 8; however, we will strive to maintain them affordable, which is not the same as subsidized housing. Immediately upon acquisition of the properties, HACSB will begin construction on various repairs and upgrades to these apartments. These apartments will be managed by Beacon Property Management and not the Housing Authority.

Barstow has approximately 24,000 residents; only 311 households participate in the Housing Authority's subsidized housing programs out of 9,218 total households throughout the county — overall a very small percentage. HACSB has no plans of expanding subsidized housing to these new apartment complexes, but simply provide affordable housing, which is important given the economic recession. As of March 2010, the Barstow unemployment rate is 18.3 percent, significantly higher than both the county at 14.8 percent and California at 13 percent. Also, based on 2008 demographic data from the County's Economic Development Department, the median household income in Barstow is \$43,804, lower than the county average of \$53,541.

We are not the stereotypical Housing Authority. For years now, HUD has designated HACSB as a "High Performer" agency based on various HUD financial, management, and operational assessments. Also, in 2009, we ranked second among other housing authorities nationwide in the number of new homeowners created through our homeownership program. HACSB strives to build strong communities one home at a time, and provide a healthy environment where individuals can be safe and secure.

HACSB is constantly moving forward in improving our programs and services to better serve residents of the County. We urge you and anyone who is interested to contact us to learn more about our programs and services, and to tour some of our housing communities.

Susan L. Benner, Executive Director, Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino

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