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## Press Release

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Contact:  
Jenny Loeb, Mid-Hudson: 845-857-8415  
Juanita Lewis, Yonkers: 914-519-8588  
Mo George, New York City: 718-612-0922

### ***Low-Income Community Members Lead Tour to Highlight Recovery Investments in Four New York State Cities***

#### **Tour Demonstrates Need for More Public Investment and Greater Accountability to Federal Programs that Serve Low-Income Communities**

New York, NY – Members of the group Community Voices Heard led a tour from New York City to Poughkeepsie, stopping in Yonkers and Newburgh along the way, to show their neighbors and officials the impact public investments under the federal stimulus funding have had on their communities. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) allocated \$787 billion in federal resources to help jump start our economy, \$34.2 billion of which is expected to be received by New York State. A year and a half after the passage of the Recovery Act, varied perceptions remain about what it has accomplished.

“The Recovery Act provided immediate relief and prevented some devastating cuts to programs and institutions that our families and communities rely on. All of us have benefited from these public investments in some way,” said Agnes Rivera a Board Member and leader of CVH.

“However,” Rivera continued, “low-income communities have been suffering long before the current economic downturn and the first round of stimulus funding wasn’t even enough to fill the gap of what the recession created. We are going to need more substantial public investment in job creation and funding for critical programs if all of our communities are going to recover and New York State is going to get on safe footing.”

The members began in New York City, where they visited public housing developments that have received stimulus funding, as well as parks training center for public assistance recipients placed in transitional jobs. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) received \$423 million in public housing capital funds of the \$4 billion allocated nationally. The Human Resources Administration (HRA), New York City’s welfare agency, received \$16 million of \$25 million allocated to the state for a statewide Transitional Jobs Program. Some of these transitional jobs resources were allocated to a transitional jobs program in the Parks Department. While a much appreciated program, members commented on how more is still necessary to meet the need.

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"The Parks Opportunities Program is a really great program because it gives people jobs," Darryl Pleasant, a CVH leader said of the Transitional Jobs Program at the recreational center in Jackie Robinson Park in Washington Heights. "We need more stimulus money because there is so much work to do and so many people need work."

Speaking about the public housing capital funds as the group visited Highbridge Gardens development in the Bronx, Anne Washington, CVH Board Member and public housing resident in NYC, said, "It is great that resources are finally being put into the capital needs of public housing – needs that have long been under-funded. However, this influx of capital funding is still not enough. Federal public housing needs \$100 million in capital funds to meet the need and NYC needs \$6 billion of that."

The bus then headed for Yonkers, where the CVH members, allies and public officials visited a Business Improvement District that received \$500,000 of the city's total ARRA community development funding.

In Yonkers, CVH Board Member and Yonkers resident Valerie Pearson said, "We have seen a number of improvements in our community from the Recovery Act funding, but a lot remains to be done. After months of meetings with the City and the municipal housing decision-makers urging them to create jobs for public housing residents, we are happy to see that Yonkers is starting the new Landscaping Corps program. These types of programs are immediately needed and it is only with more funding that they can be expanded to meet the demand of all low-income Yonkers residents looking for jobs."

Before leaving Yonkers, the group visited a soup kitchen that has experienced increased demand during these tough times. Food pantries and soup kitchens in Yonkers received \$150,000. The members then boarded the bus for Newburgh, where they discussed federal community development funding made available under the Recovery Act. Orange County received \$1.7 million in community development funds, some of which is allocated to the City of Newburgh.

"Some of the money could have definitely been spent differently in Newburgh," said CVH leader Brenda McPhail as the bus drove by the waterfront where earlier CDBG money was misspent. "Most of the Community Development Block Grant money that is meant for low-income communities never reaches us, and so far it has been the same with the Recovery funding. We need to change the way this money is spent so that the community has a bigger say in what it is spent on."

Moving on to Poughkeepsie, the group looked at some of the transportation investments made under the Recovery Act.

"The improvements are very promising," said Pat Diaz, CVH member-leader and Poughkeepsie resident. "The new buses are cleaner, have a lot more space, and are easier to get into and out of – especially for disabled people. Hybrid buses create less air pollution. The transit hub is a long-time coming and will be great. ... If it's more accessible for everyone, more people will use public transportation and there will be less of a stigma around people who take the bus."

At the end of the day, Loretta Manning, a CVH Board Member and leader from Newburgh summed it up. "We're glad to see some projects happening in our communities," Manning said, "but we all know it's not enough. We haven't seen unemployment go down, especially in our communities. The Recovery Act funding seems like a lot, but it was just a drop in the bucket compared to what we need - we need a bigger investment in creating jobs!"

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At the conclusion of the tour, CVH members called on the federal government to invest more in creating sufficient jobs, plugging our state budget gap, and rebuilding our communities. Specifically, members talked about the importance of the *Local Jobs for America Act* (H.R.4812 / S.3500) which would create 1 million jobs, over 50,000 of which would come to New York State. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand recently signed on as a co-sponsor of the Senate bill. The group sent a message through placing a series of calls to Senator Charles Schumer asking him to do the same.

*Community Voices Heard is a membership-led and directed organization with a statewide network of over 35,000 low-income individuals in New York City, Yonkers, Newburgh and Poughkeepsie. They were supported and joined by some members of the New York Stimulus Alliance, a statewide alliance of grassroots organizations, networks and researchers dedicated to ensuring transparent and equitable stimulus spending that rebuilds our state.*