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**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
Hearing: "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"
January 14, 2014
Statement of Kris Cook, CAE
Executive Director, National Affordable Housing Management Association**

Thank you, Chairman Carper for allowing me to submit this statement on behalf of the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA).

NAHMA is a 501(c)(6) non-profit trade association which represents apartment owners and managers, multifamily housing industry stakeholders, and providers of goods and services to the affordable housing industry. Our mission includes promoting the development and preservation of quality affordable multifamily housing and preparing affordable housing professionals to succeed in evolving economic and political environments. To achieve these goals, NAHMA holds three membership conferences each year that are attended by our members as well as legislative and executive branch employees.

NAHMA supports congressional efforts to improve accountability and transparency in federal spending. As the Committee conducts its oversight of agencies' conference and travel spending, please continue to consider the essential role private conferences play in advancing regulatory compliance. Private conferences, like NAHMA's three yearly membership meetings, facilitate the communication between federal agency staff and private organizations which is necessary to create constructive, effective, and transparent private-public partnerships.

Federal officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD) and the Department of Treasury-Internal Revenue Service (Treasury-IRS) attend NAHMA's meetings. Here are just a few examples of how federal agency staff participation at NAHMA's membership conferences serves the public interest:

- Agency staff from HUD, USDA-RD and Treasury-IRS provide regulatory updates and explain the correct regulatory compliance protocol for federal affordable multifamily housing programs directly to the apartment owners and management agents who participate in these programs.
- Discussions that occur during NAHMA membership meetings and other private conferences help develop and maintain public-private partnerships to deal with ongoing regulatory issues outside of the meetings. This, in turn, helps create informed policymakers that make decisions geared toward reducing excessive regulatory burdens, increasing economic growth, and creating jobs.
- NAHMA's conferences provide the opportunity for agency staff to solicit and receive feedback from industry stakeholders about improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs and reducing program costs. These exchanges also give agency staff a better understanding of the day-to-day impact of policy decisions.

Exchanges between NAHMA members and agency officials at our private conferences have resulted in improved federal housing policies. For example, in August 2011, HUD released burdensome PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROPERTY MANAGERS AND OWNERS

guidance on bedbug infestations in HUD-assisted and HUD-insured apartment buildings. The guidance was written in a way that was interpreted by some local courts as superseding the landlord/tenant lease agreements. Likewise, the guidance made it more difficult for apartment owners and managers to prevent and treat repeat infestations which resulted directly from tenants' noncompliance with treatment protocols. The NAHMA membership conference provided owners and managers with the opportunity to discuss the real impact of this guidance on their properties' operations. These exchanges gave agency staff a deeper understanding of practitioners' concerns. They also helped HUD write improved, pragmatic, and workable bedbug guidance which was released in April 2012.

For these reasons, NAHMA cannot support legislation such as the Conference Accountability Act of 2013 (S. 1347). This bill would arbitrarily limit agency staff participation at private meetings to one conference sponsored or organized by a particular organization (other than the agency) per fiscal year. Legislation that restricts knowledge-sharing between the government and private organizations is counterproductive to Congress' goals of reducing burdensome regulations, strengthening the economy, and creating jobs. Even when such bills are well-intentioned, the unintended consequences of S. 1347 or similar legislation would harm our members' ability to understand and comply with federal regulations. Additionally, federal government officials would be forced to make decisions in a vacuum without meaningful input from impacted stakeholders.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing. I also wish to thank members of the Committee for considering the positive impact on public policies which resulted from federal agency officials' attendance at private sector membership conferences.