

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**State Honors Carla Okigwe of the
Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County**

SEATTLE/Tacoma, Wash. — Carla Okigwe (bio follows) was honored this evening for a lifetime of service to the mission of expanding affordable housing resources for the benefit of Washington’s low-income residents. Before an audience of 500 colleagues, Ms. Okigwe received the Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award presented annually by the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. The awards ceremony took place on Sept. 16 at the 2008 *Housing Washington* conference at the Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center.

The Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award is named after a long time advocate for affordable housing, who was committed to strengthening communities and the quality of life for people in need of affordable housing.

The Commission (based in Seattle) also presented six *Friend of Housing* awards to five individuals and one organization. Honorees were selected for their leadership and exceptional contribution to creating or supporting affordable housing, implementing housing-related programs, creating innovative financing mechanisms for housing, supporting homebuyer education or technical training efforts within the housing community and helping to solve housing problems.

Washington State Housing Finance Commission is a publicly accountable, self-supporting agency dedicated to increasing housing access and affordability and to expanding the availability of quality community services for Washington state residents.

Additional background information on each award recipient is available through Bombar Public Relations at caroline@bombar.com or 425-260-3302.

A brief bio on Carla Okigwe, executive director, Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County follows:

Carla Okigwe has been a central figure in Seattle affordable housing since the mid-1980's when she worked at the City of Seattle and King County planning departments. In 1988, she was the spearhead and founding director of the Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County, formed when a number of nonprofit organizations merged to focus on improving the stipulations for nonprofit housing development. Back then, these developers were not recognized as legitimate participants in residential real estate. Under Ms. Okigwe stewardship, the Consortium became the catalyst for development and capacity building for the nonprofit organizations by negotiating and forming collaborations with the city, county and the lending community.

From the beginning, Ms. Okigwe was a leader in state housing advocacy and policy. She designed the first Low Income Tax Credit Program for the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

- She was a founder of the Washington Low-Income Housing Congress and chaired the organization when it hired its first professional lobbyist and advocated for the creation and funding of the state Housing Trust Fund.
- As a leader of the Capitol Forum, a creative effort in the early 1990's, Ms. Okigwe joined Governor Mike Lowry and today's Speaker Frank Chopp in advocating passage by the state legislature of a joint package of capital funding priorities that included low-income housing as well as education, health care facilities and open space.
- Ms. Okigwe secured federal funding to create the Washington Low-Income Housing Network, a statewide charitable organization to educate, inform, organize and mobilize grassroots advocacy. In 2001, the Housing Congress and the Housing Network merged into the Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance.

Ms. Okigwe was also a force in the 1995 and 2002 Seattle housing levy campaigns, and proved herself a tireless fundraiser, organizer, and educator.

“Carla has an extraordinary ability to perceive both the breadth and depth of affordable housing issues in Washington state,” according to Paul Lambros, executive director of Plymouth Housing Group. “On the one hand, she understands the concerns of nonprofit developers, advocacy groups and public policy makers. At the same time, she uses her skills as an urban planner to foresee trends and advocate for planning and action on behalf of low-income people in the broadest terms. For instance, she insisted that housing targets be included in the state’s growth management planning efforts—that impacts of development on low-income people should be considered along with impacts on wildlife and the natural environment.”

According to Mr. Lambros Seattle is recognized nationally as a leader in affordable housing, and the Housing Development Consortium is credited as the predominant stakeholder group representation all parties of interest, including: non-profit, public and private developers; advocates; local government; private lenders and investors; architects; contractors; and consultants.

“Anyone who plays a role in affordable housing in this state must pay attention to Carla,” said Mr. Lambros. “Hers is a major voice and she is universally liked.”

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