

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2017

The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on July 13 to discuss the housing crisis in Cairo. Given the severity of hardship our constituents have endured, we appreciate your decision to elevate solving the crisis in Cairo to be a priority of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD's leadership, including your personal time and attention, is critical to providing urgent relief to Cairo through meaningful action.

We are pleased that you committed to joining us in traveling to Cairo to witness firsthand the unacceptable and outrageous public housing conditions, and to hear directly from families in Cairo. We are confident that, during your visit, you will be inspired by the incredible strength of the residents and gain a better understanding of their commitment to the community, including the desire of many to remain in Cairo.

During a recent hearing held before a Senate appropriations subcommittee, you commented that Cairo was a "dying community." As you can imagine, our constituents were disappointed by your negative description of their hometown. We understand these comments did not reflect your full views on Cairo and that is why your visit is important and necessary to send a strong message that in spite of the failures of the past, HUD is not giving up on Cairo.

We also appreciated your pledge during our meeting to take actions to ease the difficult transition for public housing residents in Cairo. We support your decision to provide Cairo residents with temporary protection vouchers (TPVs) that have no time limits or restrictions on their use. These special TPVs will afford families the necessary time and comfort to make the right decision in determining when and where to relocate from Elmwood Place and McBride Place.

In addition, we concur with your decision to provide Cairo residents with special relocation services and benefits associated with emergency vouchers that do not have distance limitations or geographic restrictions on where they may be used in the United States. As you are aware, the threat of relocation services and benefits being limited to a 250-mile radius created significant anxiety among our constituents. We appreciated your statement during our meeting that HUD would make sure Cairo residents received relocation services and benefits on a nationwide basis.

These HUD actions are warranted and necessary in light of the severity of the crisis, the lack of immediate local options for relocating displaced residents and the uncertainty and chaos the transition has created for residents and the broader Cairo community, particularly for families with

school-aged children and the local school district. They represent a positive first step, but require diligent implementation, oversight and robust resourcing to become reality.

Finally, we join the residents of Cairo in calling for wrongdoers who victimized tenants and violated the public trust to be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law.


As we discussed, HUD's issuance of proposed notices of debarment to previous Executive Directors and a former Board member is an encouraging development. However, these actions alone fall short of achieving justice for the residents. That is why we support you in your commitment to pursue strong civil penalties as part of your enforcement action and support your ongoing internal investigation into HUD operations and procedures that contributed to the failures of the Alexander County Housing Authority.

As HUD continues to prioritize addressing the crisis in Cairo, we are committed to supporting you and the Department when your actions put the needs of the residents of Cairo first and as you fulfill your commitments and promises to our constituents. Accordingly, as a follow up to our meeting, please provide the following information:

1. Confirm the method and timing of the notification to the tenants of your decisions to remove the time limitation on the use of the TPVs and to remove any distance limitation on the availability of the relocation benefits associated with the emergency vouchers.
2. Provide a full briefing to our offices on the scope and status of the internal investigation of HUD operations and oversight.
3. Keep us apprised of any referrals that you make to the U.S. Attorney, or, where appropriate, to state or local law enforcement, for a full and independent investigation of the facts alleged in your debarment letters that may implicate violations of criminal law.
4. Produce the information that we have been requesting about the tenants' desire to stay in Cairo, move outside of Alexander County or move elsewhere in the state or country, including an accurate accounting of the number of families who have received vouchers but have not expressed a clear desire to leave, have requested vouchers, or have yet to apply.

Thank you again for meeting with us. We look forward to working with you and the Department to provide solutions for the crisis in Cairo, address the needs of the public housing tenants and broader community, make sure that justice is served and to restore economic development and hope to the region.

Sincerely,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

  
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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator