

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Dear Secretary Donovan:

We support the proposed new Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on July 19, 2013 [*Docket No. FR-5173-P-01*]. Our support is based on our shared interest in advancing opportunity in America by shaping investments in housing, transportation, infrastructure, and economic development. We urge you to move swiftly to enact a final rule, and to ensure that HUD has the tools in place to support its successful implementation.

HUD's proposed rule moves towards real solutions by clarifying that jurisdictions that receive federal housing and community development funds must take steps to expand housing options for all households in opportunity-rich communities, reduce segregation and concentrated poverty, and must also invest in high-poverty communities in order to expand opportunity for existing residents. The rule greatly improves the process by which local jurisdictions ensure that HUD funds are being used to further fair housing by aligning it with the Consolidated Plans for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME and other HUD funding and with Public Housing plans and programs. At the same time, the proposed rule helps jurisdictions identify fair housing problems by providing data and analytical tools. The new tools reduce the burden on jurisdictions and allow for a consistent approach to analysis of local and regional conditions but also permit jurisdictions to identify priorities and strategies that make sense for them.

As you work to finalize the rule, it is particularly important to emphasize a point that you have articulated publicly; Jurisdictions must balance promoting new affordable housing in areas of high opportunity with investing resources to revitalize distressed areas. At the same time, they must try to avoid involuntary displacement as new investments are made in transportation, jobs and schools.

Successful implementation of the rule depends on establishing benchmarks against which to measure jurisdictions' progress toward addressing the priorities they identify. This component's absence from the current fair housing planning process has undermined the impact of that process. In addition, we urge you to clarify the consequences jurisdictions will face if they fail to fulfill their obligation to further fair housing, as well as the process by which the public can voice its concerns about local fair housing efforts. This will clarify HUD's expectations and set a framework for accountability.

Zip code is a major factor in determining the type of education, jobs, health and other quality of life outcomes that people in this country experience. For too long and for too many people, housing options have been limited because of race, gender, religion, national origin, family status or disability. Unequal access to vital community resources results in unequal access to opportunity, and undermines our prosperity and success as a nation. Segregation and racially concentrated poverty conflicts with long-established public policy intent as well as our shared national value of access to opportunity.

Thank you for your leadership in expanding communities of opportunity and reducing racial segregation. We urge you to move forward expeditiously with a final AFFH rule that will help all our communities make progress toward the goals of achieving housing opportunity, overcoming historic patterns of racial and other segregation, and improving coordinated public investment in areas of highly concentrated poverty. We stand ready to help.

Sincerely,