

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rent Hikes Won't Make the Poor Better Off

Jason L. Riley's "Why Ben Carson Is Raising Rents" (Upward Mobility, May 9) inaccurately describes the Trump administration's proposals to cut housing benefits for low-income families and HUD Secretary Ben Carson's ever-changing rationale for them.

Raising rents on people living in poverty won't increase "self-sufficiency." For households living paycheck-to-paycheck, an average \$117 monthly rent increase means less money for medications, food and investments in education and training. Eliminating child-care cost deductions makes it harder for families to work.

Mr. Carson's assertions that seniors and people with disabilities are protected from rent hikes are wrong. Current elderly or disabled tenants' rent increases are phased in over six years; new tenants face immediate rent hikes. Mr. Carson's claim that work requirements lead to fewer households needing housing assistance ignores the true cause of today's housing crisis: the gap between incomes and rent. The vast majority of households receiving housing benefits are the elderly, the disabled, people providing full-time care for family members or those working for low wages insufficient to cover high rents. Work requirements may cut people off from the housing and services needed to find and maintain jobs.

If his goal were to help struggling families get ahead, Mr. Carson would call for increasing—not slashing—investments in affordable housing, expanding the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, implementing bipartisan measures to allow residents to keep more earnings and improving existing HUD programs that create more jobs for low-income residents. But the rationale behind raising rents on people

living in poverty is obviously not to help those families. It's to pay for the recent massive tax cuts.

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If the government's goal is truly to encourage HUD residents to move on to private-sector housing, then rent should be lowered to 25% so the renter can save, or the rate should be held at 30% and require 3% to 5% held in an escrow savings account for a period allowing renters access to the funds for a down payment on a home or a non-HUD apartment. Limits on personal savings also need to be lifted to encourage wealth-capacity building among clients who receive public-housing assistance.

If HUD assigned a social worker to every resident and family, it would help generate realistic plans for facing life's challenges and saving for the future. The HUD housing I've encountered is substandard, and the leasing agents overseeing rental agreements on HUD's behalf lack professionalism and offer little in the way of services to lift the poor out of poverty.

Mr. Carson is arguing for a work requirement for all HUD clients capable of working. HUD currently has a program that mandates all those receiving HUD housing assistance and of working age without disabilities to volunteer weekly if they are not employed. However, this rule wasn't enforced while I was a resident of HUD. Let HUD at least get the volunteer rule right first, before mandating a work requirement.

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