

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge  
Secretary of Housing and Urban Development  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)  
451 7th Street SW Washington, DC 20410

May 3, 2023

Dear Secretary Fudge,

We write to you as tenants, community organizers, advocates, and allies who believe all people should have a safe, healthy, and affordable place to come home to every day. The organizations signing this letter are in full support of the three policy goals outlined below, which were developed by directly impacted grassroots leaders and organizers from Resident Action Project (RAP), Residents Organizing for Change (ROC), Residents United Network (RUN), The Freedom BLOC, Detroit People's Platform, Residents Organized for HousingLOUISIANA (ROHLA) and Community Change.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with these directly impacted leaders and organizers on May 10th, 2023, and for ensuring HUD staff participates in the "Grassroots Housing Justice Tour" to discuss necessary changes to improve the lives and housing security of millions of families. These are commendable steps HUD is taking to ensure that people who have faced housing instability and homelessness are part of shaping necessary policy solutions.

Black, brown, Indigenous, and immigrant community members, low-income mothers, and people who have a disability and or identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to face housing instability. Many of these same groups disproportionately: live in deteriorating subsidized housing while their landlord continues to make profits; are afraid of retaliation for organizing to improve their housing conditions; and are then at risk of harassment and/ or arrest when they use public spaces for shelter. We have an opportunity to prioritize housing access for the lowest-income tenants and protect subsidized housing before it becomes unlivable by supporting tenant organizing.

With your leadership, together we can work to ensure all people have a safe and healthy home, starting with operationalizing the following goals:

**Goal 1. Urge local jurisdictions to treat people experiencing homelessness with care.**

As an immediate step, we ask you, Secretary Fudge, to release a press statement reiterating the need to end the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness,

elevating this racial justice issue as a top priority of the Agency. This press statement should be directed toward all HUD grantees, uplifting recent HUD guidance on “Leading with Kindness in Encampment Resolution,” which states “Communities must not criminalize homelessness.”<sup>1</sup> The statement should address the steps that will be taken to incorporate language against criminalization into HUD guidance, FAQs, grant competitions, and other HUD communication, including the House America effort.

Too often, people are harassed or arrested for acts of survival. HUD should immediately undertake a review of its competitive grant processes to incorporate a scoring rubric that provides meaningful weight to state and local grantees who offer concrete evidence of their implementation of best practices,<sup>2</sup> including: stopping encampment evictions; ending policies that punish people experiencing homelessness; incorporating a holistic team for crisis response; and avoiding police presence for non-life-threatening situations involving people experiencing homelessness.

**Goal 2. Ensure that landlords participating in federal subsidy programs maintain homes that comply with health and safety standards.**

Ensure tenants have safe living conditions. The new National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE) have a goal of prioritizing health and safety over appearance. NSPIRE offers the opportunity for improved HUD oversight in order to hold landlords accountable. When landlords fail to make timely and required health and safety repairs, HUD must exercise its oversight authority to ensure Public Housing Authorities (PHA) use existing enforcement remedies including monetary penalties and replacement. In cases when the replacement of property management is necessary, tenants should be engaged in this process.

Landlords should be responsible for providing temporary accommodations for tenants when their home is in disrepair. Currently, the Housing Assistance Payment Contract (HAP), which landlords sign, includes a list of possible remedies that may be exercised by PHAs when a property owner fails to abide by the agreed-upon Housing Quality Standards. HUD should update the pertinent regulations and the HAP contract to include a statement about landlords’ responsibility to provide “reasonable temporary tenant accommodations when repairs exceed the allotted correction time frame” to the list of possible remedies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Leading With Kindness in Encampment Resolution | HUD Exchange](#)

<sup>2</sup> For example, Continuum of Care program applications offer just 2 out of a possible 100 points for the section on strategies to prevent criminalization, with little oversight of whether said activities are actually taking place. See 1D-4, p 21 [FY 2022 CoC Application Detailed Instructions for Collaborative Applicants](#)

HUD should improve the process of ending ties with landlords through suspension or debarment when landlords repeatedly fail to maintain healthy living conditions. HUD should work on improving landlord systems and databases across all 10 HUD regions for more efficient tracking. HUD's current FY24 funding request to create a tenant complaint tracking system should ensure that any tenant complaint tracking system documents the landlords tied to these complaints.<sup>3</sup>

**Goal 3. Additional support and resources for HUD-subsidized tenants to organize to improve their housing communities.**

HUD should create a Department of Tenants' Rights to be a hub of educational and technical assistance and resources with the goal of expanding the incorporation of HUD tenants in policy-making, providing support for the development of tenant councils, and ensuring ongoing educational and best practice resources are available for HUD tenants and grantees.

As part of a shared priority to increase renters' rights, HUD should prioritize funding for tenant organizing, exercising its power to request up to \$10 million annually to fund tenant groups, nonprofit organizations, and public entities to build the capacity of tenant organizations and improve technical assistance (Section 514 funding).<sup>4</sup> HUD should request the full \$10 million from Congress in FY25 and going forward. Organizing funds should not be used for service delivery costs or provided to property owners/agents.<sup>5</sup>

And last, HUD should extend tenants' right to organize without retaliation to all tenants in federally assisted housing, including families participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.<sup>6</sup>

We fully support HUD to engage in robust conversations with directly impacted leaders and organizers around these goals during the Grassroots Housing Justice Tour, and in the conversation with you Secretary Fudge, on May 10th, and in the future. Together we can ensure that directly impacted people remain at the center of all that we do.

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<sup>3</sup> [HUD's 2024 Congressional Justifications](#), Table 2, p 50-4.

<sup>4</sup> Section 514 of the Multifamily Assisted Housing Reform and Affordability Act of 1997

<sup>5</sup> [Summary: Stakeholder Recommendations for New Section 514 Grant Programs](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Expanding Federal Support for Tenant Organizing in Federally Assisted Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Program](#)

**The undersigned organizations, in solidarity with directly impacted leaders, urge HUD to make clear commitments with concrete, immediate action steps to urgently operationalize these aforementioned goals.**

Thank you for working towards putting tenants first.

Sincerely,

Black Feminist Futures  
Charleston Area Justice Ministry  
Granite State Organizing Project  
Housing California  
Housing Narrative Lab  
HousingLOUISIANA  
Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants  
Midlands Organized Response for Equity and Justice  
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength  
National Alliance of HUD Tenants  
National Coalition for the Homeless  
National Housing Law Project  
National Women's Law Center  
Neighborhood Partnerships  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
Pittsburgh United  
PolicyLink  
Race Forward  
The Millennia Resistance Campaign