



January 11, 2017

The Honorable Michael Crapo
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking
Housing, and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking,
Housing, and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: The Nomination of Benjamin Carson to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

Dear Chairman Crapo and Ranking Member Brown:

The undersigned leaders of prominent African-American civil rights organizations write to express our strong concerns regarding the nomination of Ben Carson as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Despite his many accomplishments as a noted neurosurgeon, he lacks the experience required to lead HUD and ensure it fulfills our nation's promise of equal opportunity in housing.

HUD's "mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all" and "build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination"¹ The Fair Housing Act (FHA), which HUD enforces, was passed by Congress in 1968, approximately a week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It remains one of his

¹ See <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/about/mission>.

most important legacies. Indeed, equal opportunity in housing is one of our most cherished American values. As our nation becomes more diverse in every way, the FHA helps to foster stronger and more inclusive communities, which are critical to our nation's success and prosperity.

To this end, HUD officials should continue to aggressively enforce the FHA which is dedicated to ensuring access to our country's housing is free of discrimination, including expeditiously and thoroughly investigating race and national origin complaints, ensuring fair mortgage lending for homeowners, and carrying out strategies to end homelessness. All of these policies are critical to achieving economic justice and advancement in this country.

Any prospective HUD Secretary must be steeped in the complexities of housing policy and have a significant commitment to civil rights and fair housing. The new HUD secretary must also be prepared to continue to implement the new HUD rule advancing the FHA's mandate to affirmatively further fair housing, "a major push against America's deeply entrenched housing segregation."² The rule requires "local communities to assess their own patterns of racial and income segregation and make genuine plans to address them" in order to dismantle the legacy of "government and private-sector discrimination that has resulted in poor, segregated neighborhoods persisting to this day."³

We are deeply concerned about the appointment of Dr. Carson to lead the agency charged with being the guardian of fair housing in this country. He has not demonstrated any of the requi-

² See *How Ben Carson at Housing Could Undo a Desegregation Effort*, November 23, 2016, available at <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/upshot/how-ben-carson-at-housing-could-undo-a-desegregation-effort.html?Op19G=c>.

³ See *Id.*

site experience or expertise in fair housing policy. Rather, all publicly available information connecting Dr. Carson to federal housing policy indicates a deep incomprehension of its significance and scope, if not hostility to HUD's mission and our nation's housing policies. In 2015, for example, in *Experimenting with Failed Socialism Again*, Dr. Carson wrote that the new HUD rule was a "government-engineered attempt[] to legislate racial equality" and reflected a history of "failed social experiments."⁴ Dr. Carson "once told a television interviewer that he had risen above his circumstances by realizing that 'poverty is really more of a choice than anything else,' by which he apparently meant that people escape poverty through hard work."⁵ Dr. Carson's views are cause for alarm as they reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the FHA and its mandate to affirmatively further fair housing, a mandate acknowledged by both Democratic and Republican HUD Secretaries.⁶ Also, Dr. Carson's lack of experience does not compare well with his Democratic and Republican predecessors, most of whom at least possessed some government experience.⁷

We strongly urge members of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee to thoroughly and carefully examine Dr. Carson's record concerning these issues and ask the Com-

⁴ See *Experimenting with Failed Socialism Again*, Washington Times, July 23, 2015, available at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/23/ben-carson-obamas-housing-rules-try-to-accomplish-/>.

⁵ See *Critics Worry Over How Ben Carson, Lacking Expertise in Public Housing, Will Lead It*, The New York Times, Dec. 5, 2016, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/us/trump-ben-carson-hud-critics.html?_r=0.

⁶ See *How Ben Carson at Housing Could Undo a Desegregation Effort*, November 23, 2016, available at <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/upshot/how-ben-carson-at-housing-could-undo-a-desegregation-effort.html?0p19G=c>.

⁷ See *Critics Worry Over How Ben Carson, Lacking Expertise in Public Housing, Will Lead It*, The New York Times, Dec. 5, 2016, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/us/trump-ben-carson-hud-critics.html?_r=0.

mittee members to thoroughly question Dr. Carson during the upcoming hearing rigorously regarding his fitness to occupy this important post. More than three million instances of housing discrimination occur each year, and the vast majority are unreported. When Americans are denied equal access to housing, it reduces the availability of good jobs, quality education, safe streets, and a clean and healthy environment, all of which are central to the American Dream. A strong and vigorous HUD, led by a competent Secretary committed to its mission, is critical to ensuring that dream is realized.

For the forgoing reasons, we urge the Committee to fulfill its Constitutional responsibility to seriously examine the record of Dr. Carson and his preparedness to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Sincerely,



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Wade Henderson
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