

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Financial Services
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 13, 2022

Marcia L. Fudge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge:

Within less than a week, our nation has seen two significant fire-related tragedies that took the lives of people, including children, living in federally assisted housing located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the Bronx, New York. Unfortunately, this tragedy highlights the unsafe and inadequate housing conditions that too many families currently face across the country and our nation's affordable housing crisis that forces families to accept such conditions. However, it is egregious that preventable life-threatening events continue to happen in housing supported by the federal governments. Every family should be able to live safely in their homes. This is a systemic issue that has a solution.

The Committee on Financial Services has long cared for the health and safety of assisted residents. We have held various hearings and passed legislation to address these issues, including a bill requiring carbon monoxide detectors in federally assisted housing after multiple assisted residents lost their lives to carbon monoxide poisoning. We have engaged with residents of assisted housing to better understand their experiences living in substandard conditions. Most recently, the House passed the Build Back Better Act, which includes legislation passed by the Committee to provide over \$150 billion to increase the supply of quality affordable housing. In particular, this includes funds that would help improve local housing conditions to avoid similar tragedies and save lives in the future, such as \$65 billion to address health and safety concerns in public housing and \$1 billion to improve the conditions of HUD-assisted multifamily rental properties. The bill also includes \$1.75 billion in funding that can be used to increase local capacity for building inspections and code enforcement.

The number of tragedies occurring in federally assisted housing and resulting in lost lives over the years is unacceptable. We request that you submit detailed written responses to the questions outlined below as soon as possible.

1. How is HUD assisting in the process of relocating residents displaced by the fires in the Bronx and Philadelphia? What resources has HUD provided to families affected by the fire, including services such as counseling?
2. The property where the fire occurred in Philadelphia last received a Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) score of 33 out 100 during a 2017 inspection which also found life threatening and fire safety violations. The property has not received a follow-up REAC inspection since then. Please provide additional information on the following issues:

- When a HUD-assisted property receives a failing REAC score, does HUD have any policies in place for accountability?
 - What is HUD doing to ensure more frequent REAC inspections of failing properties?
 - Of all HUD-assisted properties, how many received a failing score during their latest REAC inspection?
 - What percent of the total HUD-assisted portfolio does this represent?
 - Where are these properties located and are any of them geographically concentrated in certain communities?
3. In the case of the Bronx fire, 76 project-based vouchers were concentrated in the Twin Parks Northwest high-rise, which is a privately-owned apartment complex. What role does HUD, including its Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO), play in the determination and approval of where project-based vouchers are located? When a high threshold of project-based vouchers are located in a single property, how does that change the role of HUD and relevant Public Housing Authorities (PHA) in overseeing these properties?
 4. In Philadelphia, one of the affected families included 14 members living in a 4-bedroom home and were on a waiting list for a 6-bedroom unit. How does HUD, including FHEO, work with PHAs to ensure families have access to housing that adequately accommodates the size of their household?
 5. What role does HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity play in the relocation process to help families relocate to the communities of their choice?
 6. During the coronavirus pandemic, HUD instituted a pause on inspections from March 2020 through June 2021. What is HUD doing to immediately address the backlog of inspections and ensure resident safety?

Please respond to Committee staff within two business days of receipt of this letter to confirm receipt and to discuss next steps for providing the requested information. We look forward to your prompt response to these questions, which can be directed to Financial Services staff. Please contact Elayne Weiss, Director of Housing, Community Development, and Insurance at elayne.weiss@mail.house.gov and Alia Fierro, Deputy Director of Housing, Community Development, and Insurance at alia.fierro@mail.house.gov.

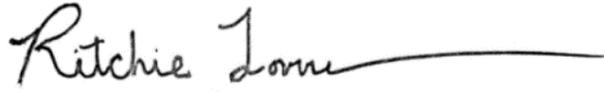
Sincerely,



Maxine Waters
Chairwoman



Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Madeline Dean
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Patrick McHenry, Ranking Member

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January 13, 2022

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Marci M. Booth
Chief Executive Officer
LIHC Investment Group
One Portland Square, Suite 6A
Portland, ME 04101

Paul Odland
Founder, Managing Partner
268 Bush Street, #3534
San Francisco, CA 94104

Rick Gropper and Andrew Moelis
Principals
Camber Property Group
116 E. 27th Street
New York, NY 10016

AnnMarie Santiago
Deputy Commissioner for Enforcement and
Neighborhood Services
NYC Department of Housing Preservation
and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10038

Greg Russ
Chair and CEO
New York City Housing Authority
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Ruth Anne Visnauskas
Commissioner and CEO
New York State Homes and Community
Renewal
641 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Dear Mayor Adams, Commissioner Visnauskas, Deputy Commissioner Santiago, Mr. Russ, Ms. Booth, Mr. Odland, Mr. Gropper, and Mr. Moelis:

Within less than a week, our nation has seen two significant fire-related tragedies that took the lives of people, including children, living in federally assisted housing located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the Bronx, New York. Unfortunately, this tragedy highlights the unsafe and inadequate housing conditions that too many families currently face across the country and our nation's affordable housing crisis that forces families to accept such conditions. However, it is egregious that preventable life-threatening events continue to happen in housing supported by the federal governments. Every family should be able to live safely in their homes. This is a systemic issue that has a solution.

The Committee on Financial Services has long cared for the health and safety of assisted residents. We have held various hearings and passed legislation to address these issues, including a bill requiring carbon monoxide detectors in federally assisted housing after multiple assisted residents lost their lives to carbon monoxide poisoning. We have engaged with residents of assisted housing to better understand their experiences living in substandard conditions. Most recently, the House passed the Build Back Better Act which includes the Committee's title that provides over

\$150 billion to increase the supply of quality affordable housing. In particular, this includes funds that would help improve local housing conditions to avoid similar tragedies and save lives in the future, such as \$65 billion to address health and safety concerns in public housing and \$1 billion to improve the conditions of HUD-assisted multifamily rental properties. The bill also includes \$1.75 billion in funding that can be used to increase local capacity for building inspections and code enforcement.

At a time when many east coast cities are facing freezing weather advisories, including in New York City, families may be forced to turn to their own solutions, such as space heaters, to keep healthy, safe, and warm. However, it is still the responsibility of property owners to ensure that the conditions of their buildings protect the health and safety of residents. This responsibility undoubtedly includes providing adequate heat, fire safety measures, and responding to any life-threatening defects identified by residents, local officials, or inspectors. The loss of life at Twin Peaks Northwest is an unacceptable and preventable tragedy. As such, We request that you submit detailed written responses to the questions outlined below as soon as possible.

1. What are you doing to ensure residents displaced by the fire can promptly find new housing? How are you working to relocate families in the neighborhoods of their choice? What additional services, such as counseling, are being provided to families impacted by the fire?
2. When was the self-closing fire door last inspected? What was the outcome of that inspection? Have the owners been cited in the past for fire door violations?
3. When was the property last inspected to ensure it was meeting local and state building codes? What was the outcome of that inspection? What was done to remediate any violations?
4. When was the property last inspected to ensure it was meeting Housing Quality Standards (HQS)? What was the outcome of that inspection? What was done to remediate any violations?
5. Do apartment staff conduct daily site visits to check for any health and safety issues at your properties? Do property owners plan to improve daily health and safety checks at all of their properties?
6. How many maintenance requests have you received from residents living in the property? Were any of those requests related to the building's heating system or any other issue implicating health and safety, including fire safety measures?
7. The property affected by the fire was largely subsidized by the Housing Choice Voucher program, including 76 units that had a project-based voucher attached to it. Given the significant presence of public housing resources in this property, what has your public housing authority (PHA) done to ensure the health and safety of assisted residents? What other properties have you attached project-based vouchers to more than 10 percent of the building's units and where are they located?
8. What are you doing to ensure families in other properties that you own are safe from experiencing a similar tragedy?

9. How many properties do you own and how many of those properties house families with vouchers? Of those families, how many have project-based assistance?

Please respond to Committee staff within two business days of receipt of this letter to confirm receipt and to discuss next steps for providing the requested information. We look forward to your prompt response to these questions, which can be directed to Financial Services Committee staff. Please contact Elayne Weiss, Director of Housing, Community Development, and Insurance at elayne.weiss@mail.house.gov and Alia Fierro, Deputy Director of Housing, Community Development, and Insurance at alia.fierro@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



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cc: The Honorable Patrick McHenry, Ranking Member

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January 13, 2022

The Honorable Jim Kenney
Mayor of Philadelphia
City Hall, Office 215
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Kelvin Jeremiah
President and CEO
Philadelphia Housing Authority
2013 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19121

Dear Mayor Kenney and Mr. Jeremiah:

Within less than a week, our nation has seen two significant fire-related tragedies that took the lives of people, including children, living in federally assisted housing located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the Bronx, New York. Unfortunately, this tragedy highlights the unsafe and inadequate housing conditions that too many families currently face across the country and our nation's affordable housing crisis that forces families to accept such conditions. However, it is egregious that preventable life-threatening events continue to happen in housing supported by the federal governments. Every family should be able to live safely in their homes. This is a systemic issue that has a solution.

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For years, we have raised concerns with HUD's Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration program, which seemingly intends to allow public housing authorities to raise capital and improve the quality of federally assisted housing. Yet, we are now dealing with this tragedy that occurred in an apartment building that is not only managed by an MTW agency but also received a failing score in its last inspection in 2017. It is unacceptable and as such, we request that you submit detailed written responses to the questions outlined below as soon as possible.

1. What are you doing to ensure residents displaced by the fire find new housing? How are you working to relocate families in the neighborhoods of their choice? What additional services, such as counseling, are being provided to families affected by the fire?

2. When was the property last inspected to ensure it was meeting local and state building codes? What was the outcome of that inspection? What was done to remediate any violations?
3. According to HUD data, the property where the tragedy occurred last received a Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspection in 2017. During the inspection the property received a failing score of 33 out of 100 and had life-threatening violations, including violations related to fire safety. How has the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) worked to improve the conditions of this property, including addressing these violations? What is PHA doing to address health and safety conditions in its entire portfolio?
4. What are you doing to ensure families in other PHA-owned properties are safe from experiencing a similar tragedy?
5. Do you and your staff conduct daily site visits to check for any health and safety issues at your properties?
6. How many families are currently on a waitlist for units that better accommodate their needs, including occupancy?
7. PHA has been working to reposition its housing stock, particularly its scattered site public housing properties. What was PHA's timeline for repositioning its scattered site properties and was this property included in that plan? Compared to other public housing properties owned by PHA, how many maintenance requests did the agency receive from residents living in scattered site properties and what was the response time compared to other public housing communities? What were the nature of the requests?
8. PHA had 14-member family living in a 4-bedroom home who was on a waiting list for a 6-bedroom unit. How does PHA ensure families have access to housing that adequately accommodates the size of their household? Currently, how many housing units does your PHA have that can accommodate larger families and are all of these units occupied by families needing such larger accommodations? What plans, if any, does PHA have to expand this portfolio to ensure families have access to safe and affordable housing in Philadelphia?

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