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House of Representatives

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Chairman Jamie Raskin (MD-08)
**“A Threat to America’s Children:
The Trump Administration’s Proposal to Gut Fair Housing Accountability”**
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Thank you all for coming to the second of the Committee’s hearings on the Trump Administration’s regulatory attack on the welfare of America’s children. I’d like first to welcome the new member of our Subcommittee, Representative Deb Haaland from New Mexico’s first district. We are delighted to have Deb joining us and look forward to benefitting from her passionate advocacy for voting rights and the civil rights and liberties of all Americans.

Last month, the Department of Housing and Urban Development released a proposed rule that would demolish meaningful accountability for the government’s progress on fair housing and would help trap children in a cycle of poverty, stifling their growth and constricting their opportunities in life.

The 1968 Fair Housing Act required HUD to – quote – “affirmatively further” fair housing and remedy decades of systemic housing discrimination. For decades, the federal government had engaged in purposeful discrimination to segregate by race and advantage whites over African Americans. The New Deal birthed the systematic use of redlining as the federal government refused to insure mortgage loans in black neighborhoods. The Federal Housing Administration recommended building highways to rigidly separate African Americans from white neighborhoods and desirable city resources. The government financed the construction of entire communities on the condition that the houses built there could not be sold to African Americans.

So the 1968 commitment to remedy this disgraceful record was a major and promising departure. But a 2010 GAO study found that HUD had added – quote – only “limited value . . . in terms of eliminating potential impediments to fair housing.” The Fair Housing Act’s key provision therefore lay essentially dormant for a half century until the Obama Administration moved to enforce it, desegregate our communities, and work towards fair housing.

The Trump Administration now proposes a radical U-turn, choosing instead to return to the segregationist housing policies that failed the American Dream for fifty years. HUD’s proposed rule:

- eliminates consideration of race or segregation from HUD’s fair housing oversight;

- eliminates the obligation of local housing authorities to identify and address discriminatory housing patterns;
- destroys guarantees for community participation that allow people to participate in formulating the housing policies that shape their lives; and
- prioritizes affordable housing in an isolated and abstract way, rejecting consideration of the quality of the neighborhoods those houses are in.

In short, HUD is proposing to rubber stamp housing plans without serious accountability and without any eye towards making fair housing a serious national priority.

A child's zip code should not dictate his or her destiny, but studies show that living in high-poverty areas has lifelong detrimental effects on a child's educational and employment prospects, and long-term mental and physical health. More than 8.5 million children in America – 12% of this country's youth – live in concentrated poverty. African American and American Indian children are seven times more likely to live in poor neighborhoods than white children. Latinx children are nearly five times more likely.

Reviving the American Dream for everyone requires a purposeful commitment to equity in fair housing. Trump's abdication of federal oversight means kids across this country are more likely to get trapped in a poverty cycle of the government's own making. Congress must push back against this dereliction of duty.

I want to remind my colleagues of the promise of kids in low-opportunity neighborhoods. Our dear former Chairman Cummings spoke of the difference a change in neighborhood made for his own ability to reach his full potential. He said that moving to a high-opportunity neighborhood – quote – “opened my eyes to a better world. I had the opportunity to attend integrated and high-quality public schools where I was inspired to excel. It is not an exaggeration to say that the housing moves my family made were critical to the tremendous opportunities I have had in my life.” Many sociologists say that integrated neighborhoods create access to networks of social and economic opportunity which people are otherwise deprived of.

How many young people who could be inspired by Elijah's example are we failing by abandoning them and refusing our responsibility to ensure that every neighborhood is a neighborhood of opportunity? We owe it to America's young people to hold this Administration accountable for gutting the first federal effort in decades aimed at meaningfully enforcing fair housing

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