

July 9, 2019

Office of General Counsel, Rules Docket Clerk
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW, Room 10276
Washington, DC 20410-0500

Re: HUD Docket No. FR-6124-P-01, RIN 2501-AD89 Comments in Response to Proposed Rulemaking: Housing and Community Development Act of 1980: Verification of Eligible Status

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing on behalf of Alabama Arise in response to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) proposed rule regarding "verification of eligible status," published in the Federal Register on May 10, 2019 (RIN 2501-AD89; HUD Docket No. FR-6124-P-01).

Alabama Arise strongly opposes this proposed rule, and we urge HUD to withdraw the rule in its entirety. We believe this rule would reduce the availability of affordable housing for some of the poorest families in the country. We believe it would increase homelessness, particularly among families with children. And we believe it would impose burdens on seniors and people with disabilities who seek affordable housing in Alabama.

Organizational purpose and interest

Arise is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of congregations, organizations and individuals promoting public policies to improve the lives of Alabamians with low incomes. Arise believes acts of charity are vital, but they are not enough. We also must work to improve harmful policies. Arise provides a structure through which Alabamians can engage in public debates with the goal of improving the welfare of all Alabamians.

Our organization envisions an Alabama where all people have resources and opportunities to reach their potential to live happy, productive lives, and each successive generation is ensured a secure and healthy future. We envision an Alabama where all government leaders are responsive, inclusive and justice-serving, and where the people are engaged in the policymaking process. And we envision an Alabama where all people live with concern for the common good and respect for the humanity of every person.

Arise has engaged actively in advocacy and outreach to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing in Alabama. We were instrumental in passage of state legislation in 2006 requiring landlords to meet minimum standards for rental housing and provide tenants with basic housing rights. We successfully advocated for creation of the Alabama Housing Trust Fund (HTF) in 2012. We continue to advocate for state HTF funding to promote affordable housing for Alabamians with low and moderate incomes. And we have researched and reported on the lack of affordable housing for Alabamians with low wages.

Analysis of the proposed change

The proposed rule would increase homelessness, especially among families and children. By HUD's own admission, the rule effectively would evict more than 55,000 children who are now eligible for subsidized housing. These are children who are U.S. citizens or have legal status themselves but live with parents who do not.

Under both federal law and existing HUD policy, families with mixed immigration status are eligible for prorated subsidized housing, based on the citizen child's eligibility. Children, however, cannot enter into contracts for housing or apply for housing on their own. Both must be done by adult parents or guardians, who may not be eligible on their own. So to deny housing to a non-citizen parent is effectively to deny housing to an eligible citizen child.

The proposed rule would force these families either to face eviction or separate a non-citizen member from the rest of the family, including minor children. Maintaining the family unit would result in homelessness among many families eligible for prorated subsidized housing under current rules.

This proposal would increase child homelessness, which is already a serious problem in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education identified 1.3 million homeless children in 2016-17, a 70% increase since the 2007-08 school year. More than 14,000 of these children live in Alabama. This plan would harm the health, education and economic stability of tens of thousands of vulnerable children.

The proposed rule would increase the burden on seniors and people with disabilities who cannot provide proof of citizenship. The proposed rule would require applicants for subsidized housing to provide documentation of their citizenship. This would impose a significant burden on many seniors and people with disabilities, even if they are U.S. citizens.

Many Alabama seniors lack state-issued identification and do not have copies of their birth certificates. State-issued driver's licenses or non-driver identification cards in Alabama are \$36.25. And that does not include the cost of transportation to an Alabama Law Enforcement Agency office. Public transportation in rural parts of Alabama is often sparse or nonexistent, making it harder to get state-issued ID. Many seniors or people with disabilities who cannot drive must pay a neighbor to take them to town.

Copies of birth certificates in Alabama are \$15, a notable expense for people barely making ends meet. Many rural areas lack high-speed internet, complicating access to the Alabama Department of Public Health's website. And people born in other states face the added challenge of navigating another state's rules and regulations from afar.

In some rural parts of Alabama, subsidized housing may be the only affordable housing in the area. But this proposal's identification requirements would erect harmful, unnecessary barriers to that housing for many seniors and people with disabilities.

The proposed rule would reduce the availability of affordable housing for all families in poverty. This rule's damaging effects would reach well beyond mixed-status households. As families who are only eligible for prorated rental assistance lost housing, families eligible for

full-family subsidies would replace them. If HUD replaced the 25,000 mixed-status families with those eligible for full subsidies, the increased federal cost to house these families would be \$65 million annually. Absent increased appropriations, this change would lead to reductions in either the amount or quality of subsidized housing available for low-income renters, including U.S. citizens.

Conclusion

Alabama Arise believes the proposed rule would reduce the availability of affordable housing for all families with low incomes. We also believe it would increase family homelessness and negatively impact seniors and people with disabilities. Arise urges HUD to withdraw its current proposal immediately. And we urge the agency to work instead to strengthen its commitment to affordable housing for all families in the United States.

Sincerely,

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