



December 2, 2021

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

Re: Support for Housing Choice Voucher tenant engagement and organizing in the President's 2023 Budget

Dear Secretary Fudge,

Resident participation is integral to the development of affordable housing communities. In fact, both Congress and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have acknowledged that resident participation can be crucial to the success of HUD's housing programs. Activities like resident advisory boards and independent tenant organizations assist in sustaining affordable housing programs by facilitating unity among residents and empowering them as advocates. These activities are also instrumental in protecting the rights of residents and forwarding housing policy at the state and federal level.

HUD established an explicit right to organize in the public housing and project-based rental assistance housing programs, but this same right does not exist within the tenant-based rental assistance programs. While families assisted by tenant-based rental assistance programs can participate in resident advisory boards (RABs) and serve on PHA boards, there is no explicit right to organize for Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participants. Voucher tenants are therefore less protected from retaliation for organizing activities and are less likely to participate in a tenant organization representing their interests.

In addition, in public and project-based housing, PHAs and owners are provided with funds to support tenant participation activities. HUD gives PHAs, for example, \$25 per unit each year via the Operating Fund¹ to support resident participation activities. There is no such allotment for the Housing Choice Voucher program.

HCV holders should have the same organizing protections and funding for resident participation that HUD has provided in the public housing and project-based programs. Moreover, though there is some level of funding for resident participation activities within the public housing and project-based rental assistance housing programs, the existing funding is not sufficient to keep pace with the level of need in most communities. Tenant organizing activities have been funded

¹ 24 CFR § 964.150; Notice PIH 2021- 16 (HA).

at \$25/unit for years without accounting for increased costs and inflation. President Biden's 2023 budget presents an opportunity for affordable housing programs across the board to receive adequate funding for resident participation. This investment in resources for residents would serve to strengthen affordable housing programs at their core.

We urge the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Biden administration to consider the inclusion of the following items in President Biden's 2023 budget:

- An increase in the amount of funding per year, per unit for tenant participation activities across all public and project-based housing programs;
- Funding for organizing activities for HCV tenants (along with right to organize protections for HCV tenants)
- Funding, separately from the money allocated to fund resident organizing activities, for resident capacity-building programs throughout the country.

It is imperative that resident participation activities are appropriately funded. It is even more critical that all residents engaged in these programs have a clearly established right to organize. Residents play a key role in all successful housing programs. Positive innovations in affordable housing must include support for residents who seek to be involved in their housing experience.

Sincerely,

Philip Tegeler
Darryn Mumphery
Poverty & Race Research Action Council

Deborah Thrope
Bridgett Simmons
National Housing Law Project

cc: Peggy Bailey, Senior Advisor on Rental Assistance
Danielle Bastarache, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Erika Poethig, Special Assistant to the President, Housing and Urban Policy