

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2018

The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

We write to request information about the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) recent decision to close two public housing complexes in Thebes, Illinois.

Thebes is a historic community located in Illinois' southernmost county, Alexander County. Once the county seat, it was home to a thriving steamboat port used by Union troops during the American Civil War. But over the past century, Thebes has suffered a steady economic decline leading many residents to abandon their community. HUD's rash decision to abandon the people of Thebes has only made the problem worse, accelerating the loss of residents and worsening the public housing crisis in Thebes.

On February 7, 2018, HUD officials called a meeting to announce that approximately 85 residents living in Mary Alice Meadows and Sunset Terrace will be relocated by the end of the year. Some of these residents recently moved from public housing units in Cairo, Illinois, and were told when they moved that they would have at least five years of permanent residency in Thebes. If this relocation effort advances, Thebes will lose a significant portion of its population, creating even greater economic distress for the community. Moreover, this decision would leave Alexander County without family public housing.

Nevertheless, HUD officials are moving forward with relocation efforts, citing the need to relocate these residents due to the high cost of repairs of vacant units, for which HUD has received only one reported cost estimate.

This is not the first time we have raised concerns with you or your staff about public housing closures and relocation efforts by HUD in Alexander County. Just last year, residents living in the Elmwood and McBride complexes in Cairo, Illinois, were notified that ACHA planned to close the housing complexes, after decades of mismanagement and years of unanswered requests for repairs and upkeep. We raised questions about meeting the needs and desires of the tenants and the community, oversight, the legal basis of your actions, and the outcomes that you were seeking. And we are still waiting for adequate responses on these issues. Now, the residents of Mary Alice Meadows and Sunset Terrace find themselves in the same state of uncertainty as the residents in Cairo.

Given these troubling accounts from our constituents, we are concerned that ACHA under HUD's authority made an ill-advised and heedless decision to relocate approximately 85 residents out of public housing complexes in Thebes. Accordingly, we request responses to the following questions:

Thebes Living Conditions

1. Has HUD made a determination of obsolescence of Mary Alice Meadows (MAM) and Sunset Terrace (ST) housing complexes in Thebes, Illinois, as required by 24 C.F.R. § 970? If so, please share that determination with our offices.
2. Has there been a formal report on the condition of the Thebes buildings evaluating the estimated renovation costs (if any) for each unit? If so, please share that evaluation with our offices.
3. How many relocation vouchers are needed to relocate current residents of MAM and ST?

Tenant Needs and Census

4. Has HUD applied for additional Temporary Protection Vouchers (TPVs) for Thebes?

If not, why not?

If not, what steps has HUD taken to ensure that the relocation needs of Thebes residents will be met without compromising the existing relocation needs of Cairo residents?

5. How many households, individuals and children are currently living in MAM and ST who would be subject to relocation?

How many school-aged children will be affected?

How many of these residents wish to be relocated?

How many of these residents wish to relocate locally within Thebes?

Are the residents being offered units in Cairo or other public housing?

How much time will the residents have to move?

Are there any residents with special circumstances or considerations (disabled, health issues, etc.) that would require special consideration when relocating?

Have all residents been informed of the decision to relocate them?

How many residents are actively participating in relocation?

Because this is an involuntary relocation, please provide us copies of the required notices that you have issued.

6. What steps has HUD taken to ensure all MAM and ST residents have full access to relocation and mobility counselors?

What steps has HUD taken to ensure Elmwood and McBride residents' access to relocation and mobility counselors is not limited?

Thebes Expression of Interest

7. The submission deadline for the Expression of Interest closed on March 22. Have you received any applications?

If so, what is the review process and timeline for those applications?

If no applications were received, what is the next step?

HUD Legal Authority

8. Has ACHA, Menard County Housing Authority or HUD submitted an Inventory Removal application for MAM and ST?

If yes, has HUD created a written relocation plan for residents from MAM and ST as required under Section 6 of the Inventory Removal application? If so, please share.


9. What is HUD's process for considering an Inventory Removal application from a PHA that is presently under receivership by HUD?
10. What legal authority does HUD have to allow MAM and ST residents to use TPVs originally issued in contemplation for Elmwood and McBride housing complex residents also currently being relocated?

ACHA Transition


11. HUD has indicated that it intends to release ACHA from receivership by the end of 2018. Does HUD have a transition plan for how they intend to return control and what progress metrics is HUD tracking before such a transition could occur? If so, please share that plan and metrics with our offices. If not, why not?
12. How will the remaining public housing stock in ACHA be administered? Is HUD planning on bringing in another PHA that can serve in place of ACHA?
13. What legal authority does HUD have to administer demolition dollars for Elmwood and McBride?

Please provide your response and the documents requested no later than April 12, 2018.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator