

As leaders of public housing authorities in the Puget Sound region, we are distressed that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is enacting a new rule that is directly counter to the Federal Fair Housing Act, which requires all federal agencies to affirmatively further fair housing in the administration of their programs. As the primary housing oversight arm of the federal government, HUD bears a particular responsibility to do this.

An important tool for this purpose has long been HUD's regulation requiring local and state governments, as a condition of receipt of federal funding, to demonstrate that they are affirmatively furthering fair housing. Yet, in its new rule, HUD is largely removing any meaningful enforcement by terminating the current Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule and its reporting requirements.

HUD explains the rule change as a deference to local control, and even calls it "Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice." The administration has suggested that accountability on matters of housing discrimination by state and local recipients of federal funding would "destroy the suburbs."

This shows an astonishing disregard of the national and local racial history in housing policy, how that history still shows prominently in the nation's local housing markets and the impassioned outcry in this country right now for meaningful change in racial inequity.

Intentional federal policies over a hundred years, with the full complicity of local and state governments, incited or mandated overt racial exclusion of people of color from most neighborhoods and from programs that built a prosperous middle class. They encouraged the redlining of credit necessary to purchase homes and promoted exclusionary zoning, actions that were extensively supported by public and private connivance, and even violence.

This history of racial injustice in housing policy has played a pivotal role in racial inequity overall. The lack of homeownership, household wealth gap, concentrations of people of color in neighborhoods with underfunded schools and a lack of well-paying jobs, disparities in health outcomes and disproportionate levels of homelessness all trace to deliberate local and national housing policies. What this means is that there is not only a lot of work to do, there is also a lot of work to undo.

The doing and undoing of this work is the central purpose of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule. The housing challenge, and the nation's challenge, is to create diverse communities that eliminate deeply embedded dividing lines by race, income, color, gender, national origin, language, age and physical ability.

HUD's rule change disavows the federal role in creating the problem, delegates the solution to communities that helped to create it and abdicates the federal responsibility for fixing it that is embedded in the Fair Housing Act.

The nation is living through an anguishing yet promising moment of racial self-reflection. This should be a time to make progress on long-standing issues of discrimination and racial inequity. We encourage anyone who believes we need strong anti-racist housing laws that include accountability to contact HUD and members of Congress. Ask HUD to preserve its Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule and its reporting provisions. And ask HUD to not walk away from the obligation to lead this nation in righting the wrongs of racial discrimination in housing.

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