



Testimony of the Honorable Mike Bost of the 12th Congressional District of Illinois
Hearing Before the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance
“HUD Office of Inspector General Report: HUD’s Oversight of the Alexander County (IL)
Housing Authority”
September 25, 2018

Thank you Chairman Duffy and Ranking Member Cleaver. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee.

Today’s hearing is about government’s failure to protect the vulnerable among us. Most of you have never heard of Cairo, Illinois – but it’s time you had. Cairo is a small town in my district that was once a roaring city on the banks where the Mississippi and Ohio rivers meet. It shares a story that is similar to many across the country – perhaps in your own districts.

As the 20th Century rolled on, Cairo’s population dwindled due to changes in transportation, community strife, a lack of services, and downright neglect. But many families stayed. Proud of their city. Honoring their heritage. This includes families living in public housing units under the control of the Alexander County Housing Authority.

Many of us first learned the extent of the problems at the public housing authority in Cairo through reports in the Southern Illinoisan newspaper. The paper exposed unsafe living conditions that included units infested with mold, insects and other vermin. Many had no appliances, heating, or air conditioning. One mother was forced to spray insect killer around her young son’s bed each night due to an infestation in her unit.

After my Illinois colleagues and I requested a federal investigation, HUD placed the housing authority into receivership. The buildings were beyond repair. 185 families were forced to leave a city that they called home for generations.

The cause of this tragedy comes down to two words: greed and neglect. Over many years, the local housing authority used federal funds as their personal piggy bank. Funding intended for maintenance was used for personal travel and other perks. The Executive Director at the time

admitted to the fraud. He said, “We lived it up too good. And we didn’t see this coming and we thought it would last forever...”

Then there is the issue of neglect, which I believe should be the main focus of this hearing. Issues with Cairo’s housing authority were known to HUD for years, but little was done. It is my belief that had HUD taken these issues more seriously, we may not be here today. The federal government must do a better job of conducting oversight, especially when it involves the health and safety of people in need. Where was the ball dropped on Cairo? How did things fall through the cracks? Where is it happening in other public housing around America? And how do we prevent this from happening again?

While I may not be a member of this committee, I want to work with you, Republicans and Democrats, to ensure that reforms are implemented. I also want those who created this crisis to be held accountable. It is frustrating to me and the people of my district that these officials have not yet been charged for their alleged crimes. The people of Cairo and the surrounding areas deserve justice. I hope today is a big step in making that happen. Once again, thank you for holding this hearing.