

TESTIMONY OF
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAMES P. MCGOVERN (MA-02)

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FISCAL YEAR 2021 APPROPRIATIONS

JUNE 23, 2020

I want to thank Madam Chair Lowey and Ranking Member Granger for allowing me this opportunity. As the Appropriations Committee begins to draft this year's funding bills, I encourage you to provide critical funding for two important housing programs that will provide safe, affordable housing for Americans across the country. I also want to thank Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart for providing this time to present important priorities for the FY 2021 THUD Appropriations Bill.

First, I ask that you provide at least \$50 million to establish a nation-wide Grandfamily Housing pilot program.

Grandfamily caregivers grapple with unique and pressing issues that require real solutions. Many grandfamilies frequently come together at a moment's notice, often with a call in the middle of the night. Frequently, grandparents are financially unprepared to care for a grandchild. They often have difficulty accessing school or medical records of their grandchildren, and often lack adequate and age-appropriate housing. The Grandfamily Housing Program would establish a new nationwide pilot program to modify and build appropriate housing and fund residential coordinators to help grandparents navigate the complexities of raising a grandchild.

Over the past few months, I have spent time participating in community roundtables with constituents who find themselves in impossible situations. Often on fixed incomes, these individuals do not hesitate to take in their grandchildren and provide for them. As a result, they are often forced to find additional work or move out of their current housing. Yet, these grandparents do not complain or regret their decisions. I believe we can make their lives easier by providing them with safe, appropriate housing that covers each family member's individual needs.

We have already seen this model work successfully in Congress's own backyard – Plaza West opened in Washington, D.C. in late 2018 as the first affordable housing community for seniors, families, and grandfamilies. 50 units have been set aside for grandfamilies with income levels between 30 to 40 percent of the Area Median Income. Plaza West has a range of amenities, including activity spaces and community rooms for children.

I also ask that you increase funding for a radon testing and mitigation program located in the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes.

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas that is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Around 21,000 Americans die each year from lung cancer caused by radon exposure. U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona issued a national health advisory on radon 15 years ago, and multiple studies have found definitive evidence of an association between residential radon

exposure and lung cancer. This is a preventable danger – by providing technology to monitor and mitigate radon in homes, we can help reduce the threat that radon currently poses on American lives.

Unfortunately, HUD does not currently require radon testing in public housing units, which leaves residents vulnerable to radon exposure and lung cancer. While the President’s budget includes \$5 million for a radon testing and mitigation program in public housing, this number is insufficient to meet the existing public health hazard. To ensure the safety of families living in public housing, I urge you to provide funding above the President’s proposal for a federal radon testing and mitigation program. This is an easy fix for a life-threatening problem.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these conditions, as shelter-in-place orders have been issued for cities across the country and 26 million Americans have filed for unemployment. It is harder than ever for Americans to move out of unsafe or unsuitable housing. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that all Americans can live in safe, affordable housing that meets their needs. Thank you for your consideration of these two requests.

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