

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

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FISCAL YEAR 2022 APPROPRIATIONS

MAY 13, 2020

I want to thank Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart for allowing me this opportunity to testify. As you begin to draft the FY 2022 funding bill for the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, I encourage you to provide critical funding for two important housing programs that will provide safe, affordable housing for Americans across the country. In addition, I would also like to bring your attention to an important transportation issue.

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

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on multigenerational families across the country. At the beginning of the pandemic, for example, it was generally advised that grandparents should physically isolate themselves from their grandchildren. But that is nearly impossible for elderly caregivers to distance themselves from the children they are raising. A new study by Generations United finds that the number of Americans living in a multigenerational household has nearly quadrupled over the past decade. We saw a marked increase in grandparents raising children due to the opioid epidemic. That epidemic still rages, and it has been compounded by the pandemic. Right now, there are over 2.6 million children

being raised by their grandparents, and that number is only expected to grow. Shockingly, less than one-third of eligible grandfamilies receive housing assistance. The majority of subsidized and market-rate senior residences do not permit children to live in their buildings. As a result, almost half of every grandparent-led low-income households spend more than fifty percent of their income on rent. Clearly, something needs to change.

Over the past few years, 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.

Second, I also ask that you provide increased funding for a radon testing and mitigation program located in HUD's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes.

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas and 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, leaving residents vulnerable to radon exposure and lung cancer. To ensure the safety of families living in public housing, I urge you to increase funding above the FY21 enacted level 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 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.

Finally, I'd like to bring your attention to an issue I have been passionate about since I first came to Congress: ensuring that we keep our roads safe by opposing any increase to federal truck size or weight limits on interstate highways. I respectfully ask that the Committee affirm Congress' longstanding position that allowing longer or heavier trucks on our roads – whether through

industry- or state-based exemptions – presents an unacceptable risk to motorist safety and an unnecessary burden on our roads and bridges.

The reason for maintaining existing limits is simple: the bigger the truck, the harder it is to stop, and the greater the danger to everyone on the road. Stakeholders from highway safety groups, law enforcement organizations, representatives of towns and cities, and even truck drivers themselves oppose increases to truck size and weight. The last time the Department of Transportation studied this issue was during the Obama Administration, and they determined that the issue needed much more comprehensive review before any size or weight increases could even be considered.

Too many times in my career, I have consoled the families of fatal truck crash victims, knowing that their loved ones' deaths should have been prevented. I would be grateful for the Committee's assistance on this traditionally bipartisan issue, and I appreciate your consideration of the proposed report language I formally submitted to the Committee on April 30th.

Thank you for providing me this opportunity to raise these concerns and for your consideration of these three requests.

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