

**Written Testimony of Alicka Ampry-Samuel
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Before the U.S. House Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development and Insurance**

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Introduction

Chairman Cleaver, Ranking Member Hill, and members of the Committee, I am honored to have been invited to address the Committee on Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development and Insurance.

Appointed by President Biden, I serve as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Regional Administrator for New York and New Jersey. I was born in Brooklyn and grew up in New York City Housing Authority or NYCHA public housing, so the opportunity to address you all today on matters of safety in HUD housing is particularly personal. Prior to serving Secretary Fudge and President Biden, I had the honor of representing Brooklyn as the City Councilwoman for NYC Council District 41, which has the largest concentration of public housing in the country. In this capacity, I also chaired the Public Housing committee.

Above all else, I want to first offer my condolences to the families of the victims of the tragic fire at Twin Parks Northwest and let them know HUD continues to do whatever it can to support you in this time of grief and need. HUD also continues to support the families of similar tragedies in other communities. No loss of life due to fires or other health hazards, wherever it occurs, is acceptable to us and we grieve with you.

While it is beyond our authorities to manage fire prevention in every home, HUD takes very seriously the role we play in fire and safety standards in HUD-assisted housing. As a former NYCHA resident, I am extremely passionate on carrying forward this work that is a top priority for Secretary Fudge. HUD housing must be as safe, high quality, accessible and available as any housing available to those households with greater economic means. And this must apply for all communities of color and LGBTQIA+ populations, persons with disabilities, cultural and immigrant communities, Tribes and Tribal Nations, and other groups that struggle to find housing such as survivors of domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness. HUD housing must be an engine and innovator for equality and safe residency and that is what we work for every day.

Although we can sadly not change the events that made this hearing necessary, I am here today to discuss the substantial work HUD is doing to make its housing safer in the Bronx and in all communities nationwide.

Inspecting Every Property HUD Assists

In March 2020, HUD paused its health and safety inspections when it became clear that sending an inspector into a family's unit put both the inspector and the family at risk of COVID exposure. In April 2021, Secretary Fudge announced that HUD would resume health and safety inspections of its approximately 35,000 Multifamily and Public Housing properties on June 1st, 2021. When announcing the restart, Secretary Fudge said: "...we must take steps to ensure the whole health and well-being of the households we serve—including the conditions and quality of housing."

Secretary Fudge set a bold goal for HUD: the Department's 2022-2026 strategic plan includes completing inspections of all Multifamily and Public Housing properties by September 30, 2023. I am pleased to report that since restarting inspections, *HUD has inspected over 13,000 Multifamily and Public Housing properties which is the largest number of inspections ever conducted in such a short period of time.* In just the first year of Secretary Fudge resuming inspections, HUD has inspected more than 37 percent of Public Housing and Multifamily properties that HUD inspects, and HUD is ahead of schedule for inspecting 100 percent of these properties by September 30, 2023. If HUD stays this course towards achieving our goal, this would be the first time HUD has inspected all its Public Housing and Multifamily properties in an approximately two-year span.

For privately-owned buildings receiving Project-based Voucher assistance such as Twin Parks Northwest, HUD has also resumed requiring housing quality standards (HQS) inspections that were paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local public housing agencies, or PHAs, perform multiple inspections of such buildings as part of the conversion to PBVs, and inspect the units at turnover and at least biennially.

Improving HUD's Inspection Program: The National Standard for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE)

HUD has made tremendous progress on its efforts to substantially improve its physical inspections across all HUD-assisted housing. This effort, the National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE) is currently at the proposed rule and demonstration stage and would substantially emphasize resident health and safety compared to the physical condition standards in use today, the Uniform Physical Condition Standard (UPCS) for about 3.3 million Public Housing and Multifamily properties and the Housing

Quality Standards (HQS) for approximately 2.4 million voucher units. Both the UPCS and HQS standards were created over 20 years ago and the science behind what constitutes a healthy residential environment has evolved substantially, especially for fire safety and environmental health.

As part of developing NSPIRE, HUD has undertaken substantial outreach to residents and resident advocacy groups, housing providers, and experts in residential safety. In 2021 alone, HUD conducted 36 virtual workshops, which included more than 1,400 attendees spanning residents; public housing, multifamily, and voucher housing providers; academia, and public health experts. HUD has continued this outreach throughout the development of NSPIRE and believes the lived experiences of residents and stakeholder perspectives are essential to improving the health and safety of its housing.

Per the direction of Congress and this Committee specifically, NSPIRE is intended to standardize these requirements across HUD's various rental programs and the approach is such that there would be one physical condition and health and safety standard that applies to all HUD rental assistance housing, as opposed to the two used now. As reflected in the demonstration and rulemaking process, we support the framework that all HUD housing should be subject to the same standards. The new standards would specify seven areas of health and safety concerns including: 1) fire safety; 2) water safety; 3) mold/moisture; 4) carbon monoxide; 5) infestation; 6) lead-based paint; and 7) structural concerns.

The NSPIRE demonstration also includes several new and more stringent health and safety requirements for smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, fire doors, electrical systems, dryer exhausts, infestation, guardrails and handrails. NSPIRE would also provide an

opportunity for tenants to provide formal feedback about the conditions of their units that could be used to prioritize inspections and address urgent concerns.

HUD has made great strides on implementing the NSPIRE demonstration through conducting more than 300 NSPIRE demonstration inspections using the proposed NSPIRE standards since October 2021. HUD plans to conduct up to 4,500 of these inspections which will be integral to learning more about how we keep households safe.

Enhanced Fire Safety Requirements

For fire safety, NSPIRE standards would implement the National Fire Protection Association 72, which is the preeminent national standard for smoke detectors and fire signaling. It also would establish a minimum temperature requirement and require a permanent heating source, allowing residents to live more comfortably and ideally be less reliant on supplemental heat sources, such as space heaters, which can often be fire and carbon monoxide hazards. The proposed new standards, which should be available for public comment by Fall, will also include:

- More stringent and specific fire safety door requirements;
- New fire sprinkler standards including for the proper functioning of these systems;
- New safety defects for GFCI & AFCI protection of electrical systems;
- Required carbon monoxide alarms; and
- New safety defects for dryer exhausts.

Remediation and Enforcement

NSPIRE would include additional remediation and enforcement activities related to three categories of health and safety defects compared to the single health and safety deficiency category used today. Under NSPIRE, deficiencies classified as “Life Threatening” or “Severe, Non-Life Threatening” must be corrected within 24 hours, and those that are classified as “Standard” such as infestation or a damaged bedroom or closet door, must be corrected within 30 days. If these defects are not addressed within the timeframes prescribed, HUD may take enforcement actions such as re-inspection and referrals to the Departmental Enforcement Center.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I thank you for your attention and dedication to keeping our HUD families safe. HUD shares this commitment, and we know that there is more that the federal government must do. Beyond inspections, we know that much of the public and multifamily housing stock is in need of significant repairs and renovation, and the President’s 2023 Budget provides critical capital investments toward this goal.

On behalf of Secretary Fudge, HUD appreciates your ongoing support of the NSPIRE initiative and all the work that many of us are trying to do to promote better, safer housing and equality in healthy and safe housing for all populations. And as the new HUD Regional Administrator, I thank you for holding a field hearing in this community, my community, that has suffered such tremendous tragedy at Twin Parks Northwest. I look forward to working with you to serve this community. It was an honor to speak before you and I am happy to take any questions.