



Maryland Desegregation Plan Setback

After taking a close look at its fair housing settlement with HUD, Baltimore County, MD lawmakers inflict what amounts to the first chink in HUD's new Fair Housing Act enforcement armor.

Baltimore County Council members reject a HUD settlement demand to regard Section 8 federal housing subsidies as legitimate earnings. The department mandate is part of the pact inked earlier this year designed to begin moving poor inner city Baltimore families into largely white suburban county neighborhoods.

What is certain now is HUD's revenge. The department first encountered such resistance in its 2009 settlement with Westchester County, NY where county officials on reflection resisted the same Section 8 voucher mandate.

While Westchester County lawmakers eventually relented, HUD retaliated by removing \$5 million of the county's Community Development Block Grant allocation and distributing it elsewhere. But the move by county officials set back HUD's intent to make Westchester a national model for its carefully planned fair housing enforcement strategy under development since 2009.

With most of that strategy now in place under HUD's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rewrite of 1968 Fair Housing Act rules; Baltimore County was targeted as a new enforcement model.

After all, the county surrounding Baltimore city is home to many federal workers because of its close proximity to Washington, DC. That connection was thought by HUD to make it easier to propel the Section 8 earnings concept into greater acceptance.

Although there is no such national requirement under the Fair Housing Act, several cities and counties across the country have adopted the concept, including three Maryland counties -- Montgomery, Howard and Frederick. Attempts during the past two years to pass a statewide law have been unsuccessful and Republican Governor Larry Hogan is unlikely to sign such legislation into law during his term.

What HUD officials find aggravating is Baltimore County's emphatic rejection of the mandate -- the provision to make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against prospective tenants using Section 8 vouchers to pay their rent lost by a 6-1 margin.

Council members, still miffed that they were not consulted on the secret negotiations leading to the settlement, bowed to overwhelming opposition to the pact's provisions to build 1,000 new homes in white neighborhoods, transfer poor minority families from Baltimore's trouble-plagued inner city neighborhoods and provide them with full housing and welfare subsidies.

County council members complained that the settlement is designed to spread poverty rather than tackling the issue head on with plans to ease poverty.

Under terms of the settlement, the county is required to reintroduce the proposal after the next county elections, in 2018.

But HUD is not expected to sit back and wait. The settlement occurred after HUD accused the county of mismanaging its CDBG awards by failure to build low-income housing in all areas of the county to avoid clustering of poverty. The department likely will take a new look at the county's federal subsidy allocations.

The county now manages more than 6,100 Section 8 voucher families with another 35,000 households on a waiting list. Those figures do not factor in the inner-city families eligible to relocate under the settlement.

8/4/16 11:49 PM