



Landlords On HUD's Section 8 Radar

A decision to deflect criticism that it is backpedaling on Obama administration initiatives to bolster Fair Housing Act enforcement has HUD moving on several fronts with rental landlords about to bear the main brunt of the new offensive.

Long criticized for lack of a legal mechanism to recognize government subsidies -- in this case Section 8 housing vouchers -- as legitimate source of income, HUD decides to apply political pressure on landlords to recognize vouchers when reviewing applications for tenancy.

HUD Secretary Ben Carson, who has come under blistering criticism from civil rights and housing activists over his moves to weaken fair housing enforcement, is using two new studies as a backdrop for his initial effort to persuade reluctant landlords to accept vouchers.

The studies -- *Pilot Study of Landlord Acceptance in the Housing Choice Voucher Program* and *Urban Landlords & the Housing Choice Voucher Program* -- help bolster the argument that the country lacks a national standard for recognizing government subsidies as legitimate earnings for individuals.

Source of income laws have been passed in at least nine states and the District of Columbia. Several cities and counties also have approved laws outlawing discrimination against low-income renters. But Congress has not yet considered an anti-discrimination law as a national standard.

The Obama administration attempted to strengthen voucher use outside of urban poverty pockets by narrowing the Fair Market Rent rules. The effort was aimed at creating smaller jurisdictions by opening new, more prosperous neighborhoods to voucher acceptance.

The Small Area Fair Market Rent rule allowed public housing authorities, the principal administrators for Section 8 vouchers, to financially enhance vouchers, thereby allowing poor families to compete in higher-rent areas.

Quashing the SAFMR rules was one of the first things the Trump administration did in its efforts to roll back Obama-era rule-making. Housing activists immediately challenged the move and a federal court overruled the administration last December.

Carson's landlord persuasion campaign is seen as bolstering the SAFMR initiative -- which is now back in full force -- while cajoling other landlords to overcome their reluctance to accept Section 8 tenants. Landlords tend to avoid Section 8 tenants because they dislike the extra federal paperwork and frequent HUD property inspections associated with the Section 8 program or because of the negative reputation the program has accrued.

Consequently, Carson has assembled a department-wide task force to help coax landlords into joining the program. The Landlord Task Force will host a number of forums across the country to discuss the new approach to landlords after the effort is officially launched Sept. 20.

"These listening forums are intended to reveal how HUD might make its primary rent subsidy program more accessible and acceptable, specifically in higher opportunity neighborhoods where landlord participation is lowest," HUD notes in adding emphasis to its revitalized SAFMR approach.

Landlord forums are planned in Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, and Salem, OR.

Info: Read the HUD study summary at www.cepublications.com/docs/9522 and the Urban Landlord study at www.cdpublications.com/docs/9523

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