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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

GREGG RICHARD, STAFF DIRECTOR
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September 27, 2019

Secretary Benjamin S. Carson
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20410

Attorney General William Barr
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Secretary Carson and Attorney General Barr:

I write regarding the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s sudden decision to halt a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for competitive grants for specialized housing and services for victims of human trafficking (FR-6300-N-45). This NOFA was a joint effort between HUD and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) designed to combat human trafficking and provide humanitarian relief for survivors. I request that your departments immediately reinstate this funding opportunity and provide additional insights into the procedures used to withdraw the NOFA thus far.

The Trump Administration has promised to prioritize efforts to combat trafficking. In remarks given to the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the President stated, "[Human trafficking] is an urgent humanitarian issue. My administration is committed to leveraging every resource we have to confront this threat, to support the victims and survivors, and to hold traffickers accountable for their heinous crimes."¹ In addition, DOJ guidance for the survivors, victim service providers, law enforcement, and anti-trafficking advocates participating in anti-trafficking task forces has recognized that safe, adequate, and appropriate housing is one of the biggest service-related challenges communities face when serving this vulnerable population.²

In July 2019, HUD and DOJ made \$13,500,000 in assistance available to help organizations "implement and provide housing and trauma-informed, victim centered services to victims of trafficking." Further, that same NOFA dedicated an additional \$1,000,000 for entities providing

¹ President Donald J. Trump, Remarks at a Meeting of the Interagency Task Force To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, October 11, 2018. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201800694/html/DCPD-201800694.htm>

² Office for Victims of Crime, Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide, available at: <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/44-comprehensive-victim-services/safe-housing-options/>

technical assistance to ensure the successful implementation of this critical, and much needed, grant opportunity. This innovative effort was an example of federal agencies working together to solve a common challenge and build up a body of best practices that could help other communities and survivors in the future.

Unfortunately, contrary to the Administration's anti-trafficking promises, HUD and DOJ recently decided to halt this funding opportunity with little explanation or official notice to the public. Shortly after the closing date of the Technical Assistance component of the NOFA, and well into the application period for the Trafficking Program, HUD appears to have added the word "CANCELLED" to the NOFA website. This term was later, and also inexplicably, changed to "POSTPONED." This lack of process has left applicants and potential applicants with uncertainty about, and in some cases perhaps even unaware of, the postponed status of the grant.

This is unacceptable and will have real consequences for organizations working with trafficking survivors. For example, an Ohio provider working to enhance services and provide supportive housing for victims of trafficking with substance use disorder reached out to my office to share their confusion and disappointment about the withdrawal of this NOFA. The grant could have helped this organization in their efforts. Instead, your sudden and unexplained decision to indefinitely withdraw this NOFA has left this organization with unanswered questions and unpaid bills associated with grant preparation. I am certain this confusion is reflected in other communities experiencing the scourge of human trafficking across the country.

The combined \$14,500,000 for specialized housing would have equipped communities and local task forces with the tools to provide housing and supportive services to survivors of human trafficking. In the midst of a housing and addiction crisis, traffickers use drugs to exploit victims' addiction, placing them on a lengthy road to recovery, compounding the trauma they experienced, and increasing their risk of homelessness. The cycle of abuse and exploitation does not stop there, as traffickers use poverty and housing instability to lure vulnerable people and entrap more victims into their criminal operation.

Please provide answers to the following questions by October 4, 2019:

- **To what date did you intend to postpone this NOFA?**
- **What processes did you follow to notify the public, applicants, and potential applicants of the status of this NOFA? Did these processes follow HUD's established protocols for postponing or amending NOFAs?**
- **How many applications were submitted for this NOFA before it was withdrawn?**
- **What is the status of the \$1,000,000 previously available for technical assistance grants? Will these funds be awarded? If so, how will they be awarded? What process will you use to notify applicants on the status of the grant? If you will not make awards under the Technical Assistance category, how do you plan to meet the technical assistance needs of grantees?**

Survivors of trafficking must have access to safe and affordable housing, economic opportunities, and health and social supports that meet their needs. Far from “leveraging every resource we have to confront this threat” of human trafficking, a decision to postpone these housing and services grants into oblivion will be a decision to waste anti-trafficking resources already on the table.

I urge HUD and DOJ to immediately re-instate this funding opportunity and quickly make these funds available to service providers. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member