



Brown Calls On Administration to Address Federally-Assisted Housing Coronavirus Concerns

Senator Calls on White House Task Force, Administration to Engage with Residents and Provide Guidance to Operators

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) – ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs – today wrote to Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary Ben Carson and Secretary Sonny Perdue asking that the Administration and the White House Coronavirus Task Force take steps to address the health and economic concerns of millions of Americans who live in federally-assisted housing properties. Brown called on the Administration to engage with residents, owners and managers of federally-assisted housing to provide guidance on how to keep residents healthy and safe and to work to prevent evictions and an increase in homelessness due to Coronavirus.

“The federal government has a duty to ensure that families and individuals in federally-assisted housing are protected and supported during this public health emergency. You must also take all necessary steps to prevent evictions and an increase in homelessness because of this public health emergency,” Brown wrote.

In the letter, Brown pointed to specific steps the Administration should take, including providing guidance to operators about how to communicate with residents on quarantine protocol and how best to mitigate the spread of infections and providing the necessary resources to residents and managers facing financial stress due to the economic consequences of coronavirus.

Brown’s letter can be found [HERE](#) and below.

Dear Vice President Pence, Secretary Carson and Secretary Perdue:

In light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, I am writing to express my concern about the health and well-being of the millions of families and individuals residing in federally-assisted housing. I am requesting that the White House Coronavirus Task Force, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) coordinate to provide guidance to operators of federally-assisted housing properties, which are home to millions of people who are vulnerable to the health and economic shocks of the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, I urge you and your team to engage with residents, owners, and managers of federally-assisted housing to inform your assessment of the needs of both families and providers.

HUD and USDA assist over 5.2 million households and 10.4 million individuals through rental assistance programs^[1]. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk

of getting very sick from COVID-19^[2]. Over half of the households living in federally-assisted properties are headed by a person who is elderly or disabled and could fall into this high-risk category as defined by the CDC^[3].

We have seen the spread of the virus at a Seattle-area nursing home, which has health professionals on staff^[4]. HUD-assisted and USDA-assisted properties have many similarly situated residents without dedicated health care professionals on site to support residents in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. Research from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) found that HUD-assisted Medicare and Medicaid enrollees are significantly more likely to have five or more chronic conditions than Medicare and Medicaid enrollees without federal housing assistance. In the case of coronavirus infection, mandatory quarantine, or voluntary isolation, these at-risk residents will require food, access to medication, and resources to assist with the prevention of further outbreak. Coordinated guidance is needed to ensure residents of these federally-assisted communities receive these necessities. Additionally, operators and staff of federally-assisted properties will require specific guidance on how to communicate with residents about quarantine and mitigate risk of further exposure, and guidance on how to prevent spread of infections given in-building space constraints and available prevention resources.

One potential example of such specific public health guidance is HUD's effort to provide infectious disease information and toolkits to homeless providers that receive Continuum of Care and Emergency Solution Grant funding. This material provides specific guidance to help local providers prevent and manage the spread of infectious diseases among people experiencing homelessness. Of course, we know that families and individuals experiencing homelessness would be better able to manage their health and avoid infectious diseases if they have access to appropriate, permanent housing - a goal that we should be working toward.

I also request that you complete an assessment of the needs of families and providers participating in federal housing assistance programs during this public health emergency and brief my staff on your findings. In addition to guidance, the Administration must provide necessary resources help housing and homeless providers. The Administration must work with families experiencing financial stress and housing operators affected by the loss of revenue because of the loss of work due to quarantines or business interruptions. It is imperative that the Administration prevent the eviction of families and mitigate the financial stress of property owners and operators that are affected by coronavirus.

The federal government has a duty to ensure that families and individuals in federally-assisted housing are protected and supported during this public health emergency. You must also take all necessary steps to prevent evictions and an increase in homelessness because of this public health emergency. I look forward to working with you to ensure this is the case and I look forward to receiving your prompt response.

Sincerely,