

Remarks of Ranking Member Sherrod Brown
Hearing on HUD Oversight
March 22, 2018

Thank you Chairman Crapo and welcome, Secretary Carson.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, plays a critical role in the success of our housing market, our communities, our families and our goals as a nation.

So it is extremely disturbing to read about one controversy after another at the Department – ethics lawyers ignored, procurement guidelines scoffed at, whistleblowers facing retaliation, anti-discrimination efforts downgraded, key positions filled based on patronage rather than competence – it goes on and on.

And instead of taking responsibility, Mr. Secretary, you seem to want to blame others – your wife picked out the furniture without knowing the price, your spokesman said something but not you, you shouldn't be blamed for not listening to your ethics lawyers, the press is unfair – it goes on and on.

I think you need to take responsibility and get things right. HUD's mission is too important to do otherwise.

And getting things right means fighting for the funding needed to help more people in this country get a roof over their head.

Despite the importance of affordable housing, it is increasingly out of reach. A quarter of all renters today are paying over half their incomes for housing, including 400,000 households in Ohio alone. Homelessness increased last year – in the eighth year of an economic expansion.

Earlier this week, one of our great Ohio housing advocates described the affordable housing crisis as an “all hands on deck” situation.

But HUD wants to go AWOL instead. Rather than making new investments in affordable housing and our communities, the budget proposal would add to the ranks of the homeless.

Three months ago, the Administration was entirely unconcerned about the deficit when it chose to add more than a trillion dollars to the national debt over the next decade.

All of the sudden, Secretary Carson and his colleagues have rediscovered their grave concerns about the deficit, such that they want to charge extremely poor people significantly higher rents.

This is outrageous. The top 1 percent of the country will eventually see 83 percent of the benefits of the trillion tax cut.

But to reduce the deficit that this tax cut for millionaires and corporations will create, HUD is proposing that some of the poorest households in the country must pay an increase of as much as \$1800 a year in rent. All told, HUD wants to charge an estimated \$2 billion in higher rents to low-income families through rent “reforms.”

The Administration claims its cuts will “recognize a greater role for State and local governments and the private sector.” Federal assistance reaches only 1 out of every 4 eligible families. State and local governments are already strapped for cash. We know they do not have the capacity to take on those evicted by federal cuts without raising taxes on working families.

Last year, Secretary Carson reassured the public that HUD’s budget cuts would be offset in the Administration’s infrastructure package. But the Administration’s proposal did not include funding for housing and community development, despite the Secretary’s assurances that “housing is part of the infrastructure of this country, and it will be treated as such.”

There is no funding for capital spending for public housing, despite a backlog of needed repairs of tens of billions of dollars.

Under your leadership, Secretary Carson, HUD has decided a wobbly chair in a private DC dining room requires the urgent attention of no fewer than 16 staffers and thousands of taxpayer dollars.

Unsafe and unsanitary conditions in public housing that put working families and children at risk?

Not our problem, you say, – let them use vouchers.

But there is a problem – you're already underfunding the Section 8 accounts. You can't say everybody in public housing must shift to Section 8 and not provide the money for it to happen.

This budget is an embarrassment, but it and the news out of the Department of late seem all too common in this Administration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman