

Testimony of Mark Colón
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Community Planning & Development of the
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
October 7, 2021

Thank you Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of Community Planning and Development at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). I would like to start by thanking President Biden for his confidence and trust in nominating me. I would also like to thank the Committee members for allowing me this time and for considering my nomination.

I must also thank my family, friends and colleagues for their unwavering support and to recognize my beautiful and talented wife, Gina Kim and my brother-in-law, Rev. Ryan Kim, the Senior Pastor of the Korean Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, for being here to support me today.

HUD's Assistant Secretary of Community Planning and Development oversees many of the Department's most critical grant programs, including the Housing Trust Fund, the Community Development Block Grant, disaster recovery and mitigation programs and numerous homeless prevention programs.

If confirmed, I will bring nearly twenty years of relevant public and private sector experience, to help advance HUD's mission and to support the constituents who rely on these programs in your states. But before describing that experience, I'd like to start by explaining my motivation for seeking the role:

During my life, I have experienced, first-hand, the debilitating effects that sub-standard housing and limited economic opportunity can have on a family. My own family lost our house when I was twelve and we moved into one of the few, largely unregulated rentals in our area.

I was one of four siblings raised by a single mother, in, a small, working class town, in upstate New York. Our family was easily among the poorest and we wound up w/ five people living in an 800 sq. ft., two-bedroom apartment.

After my mom passed away when I was twenty, I put myself through college, working full-time, first at Westchester Community, then at Hunter College of the City University of New York.

I later earned a law degree from Yale University and spent six years working for some of the most prestigious, private law firms in the world. However, ultimately, I decided that public service was my calling and I have spent the past 13 years overseeing programs at New York State's integrated housing & community development agencies.

My life's experience has given me a unique perspective on the issues faced by most Americans, whether they're working class, economically struggling or solidly middle class. I understand intimately the difference that well-run government programs can make, both as a participant and as a program administrator. And this experience motivates me every day to find ways to improve government programs, so that more Americans from modest circumstances can access greater opportunities and a safe, decent place to call home.

I also believe that my professional background is uniquely aligned with CPD's mission of developing viable communities, through partnerships among private industry, non-profit organizations, and all levels of government, focused on expanding opportunity for those most in need.

For instance, I have overseen one of the largest, most diverse affordable housing portfolios in the country, with more than 450,000 units, from the Eastern tip of Long Island to the rural North Country, bordering on Canada.

I have also served as my agency's acting "disaster recovery" counsel, helping to lead New York's post-Hurricane Sandy and Irene housing recovery efforts, by designing policies for the award of billions of dollars in federal, State and local, publicly- and privately-sourced relief funding.

I have also served with non-profit organizations that have spearheaded disaster recovery efforts. For instance, after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, I helped lead a collaborative effort to purchase, import and distribute, island-wide, more than 12,000 solar lanterns equipped with emergency radios and phone charging capability, most within weeks of Hurricane Maria's landfall.

In short, I have worked with a range of organizations and officials of all political persuasions, in every corner of the State, and beyond. I have compiled a record of providing efficient and equitable resources to people in need, where and when they need them. And I believe that those Americans most in need of these programs would benefit greatly from someone who shares their experience, can empathize with their struggles and has a proven track record of getting things done.

Finally, I recognize the important role this Committee plays in overseeing the Department's work. If confirmed, I commit to work in a bipartisan manner and to be responsive to the needs every Senator and their constituents, working to ensure they have access to affordable housing and every opportunity to realize the American dream.

Thank you once again for your time and this opportunity and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

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