

Testimony of Julia Gordon
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Housing and Federal Housing Commissioner of the
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
August 5, 2021

Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored and humbled to appear before you today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary for Housing and Federal Housing Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

I want to begin by thanking President Biden and Secretary Fudge for the confidence and trust they have placed in me. I would also like to thank the Committee for scheduling this hearing and considering my nomination.

Before I talk more about my experience, I would also like to recognize and thank my family who have joined me today. My husband Geoffrey Berman is my most enthusiastic cheerleader and with more than 30 years at the Pentagon as a civilian IT expert supporting our troops, he models what it means to be a true public servant.

My daughter Rochelle Berman, a rising high school senior, gives me so much hope for the future with her love of learning and her gift for connection with others.

I would also like to thank my mother Rhona Gordon, who cannot be here today in person. She instilled in me the value of tikkun olam, which means working in partnership with God to make the world a better place. That value has been the lodestar of my life and career.

But my mom's life has not always been easy, and our family's experience is a big part of why I believe so strongly in the honorable mission of the Federal Housing Administration. I grew up in what we now call single family rental, and because my parents were low income, they did not retire with pensions or savings beyond their small social security checks.

Today, my mom lives in a subsidized apartment building for seniors, and her rent *still* would exceed her monthly income if not for additional housing assistance she receives from the county. This lived experience undergirds my commitment to promoting homeownership, which is the best path to family stability and prosperity, and to ensuring that we support safe, affordable, and habitable rental housing.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with President Biden, Secretary Fudge, and Congress on several time-sensitive priorities. First and foremost is preventing foreclosures stemming from COVID-related economic hardship. Currently, more than [850,000] FHA homeowners are behind on their mortgage payments. Most have had a CARES Act forbearance for more than a year now, which has left them with considerable arrearages, and many have seen a permanent reduction in income. While FHA has already done a lot of hard work to develop the right tools to help these homeowners begin to pay their mortgage again, there is still a very steep hill to climb.

My experience uniquely qualifies me to lead FHA's team at this time. Back in 2007, I worked at the Center for Responsible Lending, where my work centered first on advocating against predatory mortgage lending and later on foreclosure prevention.

Subsequently, I moved to the Federal Housing Finance Agency, where I managed the policy team overseeing the efforts Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to provide loss mitigation for homeowners. Currently, as president of the National Community Stabilization Trust, I focus on the connection between housing and strong neighborhoods, working to prevent blight and create more opportunities for homeownership. Through these experiences, I've learned important lessons and developed deep technical expertise and stakeholder relationships that I can use to navigate the road ahead if I'm confirmed to this position.

Additionally, if I'm confirmed, I would prioritize increasing the supply of affordable housing for both rental and ownership. In fact, my work on supply long predated today's headlines. Over the past decade, the team I lead has helped community-based developers put more than 27,000 blighted properties back to work for families. We also provide capital to small businesses seeking to create new homeownership, and we advocate for supply-oriented initiatives such as the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act.

Those of you on this committee deeply understand that safe, healthy and affordable housing is the necessary precondition for families and communities to thrive and prosper. If I'm confirmed, I look forward to working with you to achieve that goal for as many households as possible.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.

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