

Testimony of Damon Y. Smith
Nominee to be General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
July 13, 2021

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

I want to first take this opportunity to thank President Biden for nominating me, and Secretary Fudge for her leadership and support. I also want to thank my family and friends for their unwavering love, prayers and support that have sustained me over the years and to this very day. I am especially grateful to my mother and father. The lessons that they have taught and the values that they instilled in me are integral to who I am as a husband, father, professional and public servant. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Janine, who served as a staffer here in the United States Senate and has passed along her great respect for this institution. She has been a true partner and a blessing to me, our 3 children, and entire family.

HUD's Office of General Counsel is a special place to me, filled with dedicated attorneys, analysts and support staff of the highest caliber. I have had the pleasure of working with and leading them in other capacities, but, if confirmed, it would be a distinct honor to serve with them and all the incredible employees of HUD as their General Counsel.

There are several reasons why I find myself here today, but I would like to share a few in particular. My first lessons in housing and community came from my grandmother, who passed away this past March, just short of her 100th birthday. She did not own a car and used to walk everywhere -- often for many miles and often in high heels if headed to work -- and I would tag along every summer soaking in her stories about the people and communities that we passed. Everyone seemed to know her and love her, particularly in north Champaign where she lived for almost her entire life. She did not have much in the way of formal education, but she taught me some of the most valuable lessons that have served me well throughout my career, including the importance of a safe and supportive community. My first lessons in public service came from my father and grandfather, who both served honorably in the military. Their examples taught me that serving others in whatever way we can is incredibly rewarding and one of life's highest callings.

In my career as an urban planner, academic and attorney, I have worked on community development, housing, and housing finance issues with a wide variety of partners and clients. The through line in my diverse experiences is a fundamental belief in our ability to improve communities, provide opportunity and create better housing and development outcomes for everyone.

My work on these issues began in earnest when I sought my master's in urban planning at the University of Illinois. As a student and in my career as a planner and academic, I collaborated with low-income residents on planning, housing and community development issues and learned incredibly valuable lessons in perspective and perseverance along the way. As an attorney in private practice, I have worked on real estate and regulatory issues with developers, building owners and financial institutions and learned about the importance of clear guidelines, ethical leadership and building and rewarding a culture of compliance. And as a public servant at the state and federal levels, I have provided advice and counsel to policymakers and attorneys at all levels of government, learning how to work collaboratively and manage people effectively to achieve better outcomes.

All these experiences have increased my knowledge and appreciation of the work done by a myriad of stakeholders to ensure that we can have strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. If confirmed, I will use the knowledge gleaned from these experiences to ensure the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and their staffs are provided with timely and helpful counsel. And I will work hard to ensure that the Office of General Counsel and the entire Department operate ethically and effectively in delivering on our critical mission for the American people.

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

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