

Written Testimony of Suzanne Israel Tufts

U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Hearing on the Nomination to be Assistant Secretary for Administration at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

October 26, 2017

Chairman Crapo, Ranking Member Brown, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a great privilege to appear before you this morning. I am deeply honored that President Trump has nominated me to serve under Secretary Carson as the Assistant Secretary for Administration at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

I would like to introduce my husband of 35 years, Bob Tufts, and our daughter, Abigail. I also would like to thank my extended family, friends and former colleagues for their love and support. One does not receive opportunities like this without years of help from many people, and that is certainly the case for me.

There are two people who could not be here today, but without whose courage and life experience I would not be the person I am, nor have the passion for public service that I do -- my late parents, Abraham and Henriette Israel. Born in Europe, they were living in Antwerp when, on the morning of May 10, 1940, they awoke to an invasion of enemy planes overhead forcing them to flee.

For the next ten years, until they came to the United States, they were homeless and lived wherever they could find a roof over their heads; even, one night, sleeping under the pews of a church in France.

As the only child of Holocaust survivors, making a difference and working in mission-based endeavors has been a guiding force in my life. However, I have long believed that passion will not produce results without strong administrative and human resources support. I bring to bear three categories of skills and experience that I believe will help HUD improve its operations and services:

1. Experience in turnaround management and leadership development within mission-based organizations;
2. Experience in the field which makes me sensitive to HUD's ultimate customers; and,
3. Experience as an outside-the-box, creative thinker, with strong analytical skills and the ability to both plan and implement with energy and enthusiasm.

I gained these skills and experiences across many silos, including practicing law and spending over 20 years in management and consulting. I served as Regional Director, Region II of ACTION (the current Corporation for National Service) where I worked with HUD on a variety of tenant empowerment, literacy, health care and microenterprise programs and led the Region in improving its service delivery.

I have also served as the President and CEO of the American Women's Economic Development Corporation where I led the turnaround of this beloved but beleaguered organization. Our team succeeded in eliminating the organization's ten-year-old debt while improving its services including curriculum and on-line training. We spearheaded a nationally recognized entrepreneurship training program for women living in the New York City Housing Authority in which 65% of program participants achieved financial independence and business success.

But I believe AWED's most significant service was rendered after the 9/11 attacks. Within 72 hours of the attacks AWED provided emergency personal and business relief services for our students, faculty and alumni located around Ground Zero, as well as throughout the City; efforts that earned the organization bipartisan recognition.

My parents were able to make a wonderful life in this country; a life that started with a stable, affordable home in a safe, secure neighborhood. I can think of little that would be more meaningful than to help others find the same path to a better life for themselves and their families that my parents did. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that HUD's administrative and human resources services are best directed to fulfill its important mission.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of this committee, thank you again for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome your questions.