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MEMO TO MEMBERS

Senator Warren and Representative Waters Call for HUD Secretary Turner to Testify Before Congress on Whistleblower Allegations of HUD's Undercutting of the Fair Housing and Civil Rights Laws

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by Rayla Blackwell, NLIHC Housing Policy Analyst and San Kwon, Policy Intern

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Ranking Member of the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, and Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA), Ranking Member of the House Financial Services Committee, sent a [letter](#) to Representative French Hill (R-AR) and Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), Chairmen of their respective committees, to call upon HUD Secretary Scott Turner to testify before their committees in response to allegations HUD is failing to enforce fair housing laws. HUD whistleblowers alleged that HUD leadership is systematically undermining civil rights laws and fair housing protections at HUD's General Counsel Office of Fair Housing (OFH) and the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) (see [Memo, 9/29](#)). Following the whistleblower report, Palmer Heenan and Paul Osedebe, two HUD civil rights lawyers who spoke out about the Trump administration's efforts to limit enforcement of the Fair Housing Act, were [fired](#). [Tell your members of Congress](#) that the "Fair Housing Act" is not optional, and HUD must defend civil rights in housing!

In their letter, the lawmakers laid out three key allegations that Secretary Turner must answer for.

1. Significant staff reductions at OFH and the de-prioritization of fair housing work: HUD leadership allegedly informed existing OFH staff that fair housing was "not a priority" of the administration and that a well-staffed OFH presented an "optics problem." HUD leadership has intentionally reduced the size of OFH by 70%.

2. HUD's potential inability to enforce the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA): HUD is reportedly moving to reassign 75% of the VAWA team at OFH, a move that would strip away HUD's capacity to enforce VAWA and leave the department unable to support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

3. Gag orders for HUD attorneys and the dropping of housing discrimination cases:

HUD leadership has reportedly prevented OFH attorneys from communicating with internal parties both within and outside of HUD "without express approval from political leadership," hindering OFH's ability to enforce civil rights and fair



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housing laws. The agency has also inappropriately closed or halted at least 115 housing discrimination cases, including some where the agency had already found civil rights violations.

“The alleged efforts by HUD leadership to dismantle decades of progress are shameful, betray the American public, and represent a profound abuse of taxpayer dollars. Our respective Committees must take these allegations seriously and call on Secretary Turner to testify before Congress. Failure to act leaves millions of Americans at risk of rampant discrimination in housing and mortgage lending,” wrote Representative Waters and Senator Warren.

Take Action to Defend Fair Housing and Civil Rights!

[Tell your members of Congress](#) that the “Fair Housing Act” is not optional, and HUD must defend civil rights in housing! Ask your senators and representatives to speak out against Secretary Turner’s disregard for the law and instead insist that Turner’s FHEO enforce the “Fair Housing Act,” and fund the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) and the Fair Housing Assistance Programs (FHAP). Members can also cosponsor the “[Fair Housing Improvement Act](#)” (S.2827, H.R.5443), introduced by Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Representative Scott Peters (D-CA) to protect veterans and voucher recipients from housing discrimination. You can use [NLIHC’s Take Action page](#) to look up your member offices or call/send an email directly!

Read Representative Waters and Senator Warren’s letter calling for a hearing with Secretary Turner [here](#).

Read the House Committee on Financial Services’ press release on the letter [here](#).

Read NLIHC’s previous Memo on the whistleblower allegations [here](#).



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