

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 15, 2020

The Honorable Dr. Ben Carson  
Secretary  
Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

We write to emphasize our serious concern that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is not taking all the necessary steps to protect Americans living in federally-subsidized housing from radon contamination. As you know, HUD was Congressionally mandated in 1988 to “develop an effective departmental policy for dealing with radon contamination... to ensure that occupants of [public housing] are not exposed to hazardous levels of radon.”<sup>1</sup> As shown by an investigation published on November 22, 2019, however, tenants of public housing across the country continue to be exposed to hazardous levels of radon.<sup>2</sup> We seek to understand why HUD has not rectified this problem.

Radon, a radioactive gas that is created by natural processes underground, is the second-leading cause of fatal lung cancer in the United States. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 21,000 Americans die from lung cancer caused by radon exposure each year. Despite these indisputable facts, HUD has not proactively ensured that low-income and vulnerable tenants are safe from radon.

We are glad that HUD took a positive first step by reminding operators of public housing across the country to test for radon after the investigation’s publication.<sup>3</sup> However, this reminder remains an insufficient fulfillment of Congressional intent, as does HUD’s previous minute increases in radon testing requirements. One million-plus federally subsidized housing units across the nation may be contaminated by radon, and as HUD acknowledges itself, testing for radon is the only way to know whether there is a radon problem on a site.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, HUD neither mandates testing for radon nor enforces mitigation of high radon levels.

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<sup>1</sup> PL 100-628-Nov. 7, 1988 §1091(a)

<sup>2</sup> The Oregonian. *Cancer Cloud: The government urges private homeowners to test for cancer-causing radon gas. For low-income tenants of public housing, the government ignores its own advice.* Pub. November 22, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The Oregonian. *HUD reacts to Oregonian investigation: Radon has ‘not received the attention’ HUD encouraged.* Pub. November 25, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (undated). “RADON: You can’t see radon. But it may be a problem in your home.” [Office of Health Homes and Lead Hazard Control] Retrieved from:

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/OHHLHCFLYERRADON.PDF>

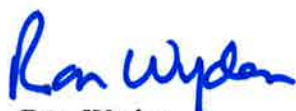
Letter to Sec. Carson, Dept. of Housing and Urban Development  
January 14, 2020

As you prepare the President's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget for release, we hope the administration will include a request for funds that is sufficient to test for and mitigate high radon levels in federally-subsidized housing. Sufficient mitigation funds are important to ensure that addressing radon contamination does not lead to an overall reduction in public housing stock. We are eager to work with you to protect Americans – especially the elderly, those with disabilities, and children and families – living in federally-subsidized housing from the risks posed by high radon levels, and urge you to take swift action to address this problem.

Because HUD has not answered previously-asked questions regarding the presence of radon in public housing, we respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss ways we can work together to solve this issue once and for all. We are looking forward to finally ensuring that this decades-old Congressional intent is fulfilled.

Please contact Madison Moskowitz in Senator Wyden's office at [madison\\_moskowitz@wyden.senate.gov](mailto:madison_moskowitz@wyden.senate.gov), or at (202) 224-1180 or Sam Mulopulos in Senator Portman's office at [sam\\_mulopulos@portman.senate.gov](mailto:sam_mulopulos@portman.senate.gov), or at (202) 224-3353 to schedule this meeting.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Robert Portman  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey  
United States Senator



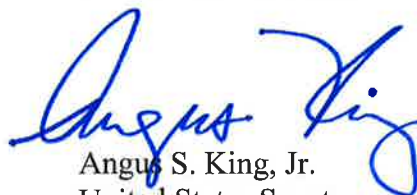
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

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Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
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