



Durbin pushes HUD Secretary Carson for his support of the families impacted by Cairo housing crisis

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WASHINGTON— During a hearing of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD), U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today pressed U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson to commit to ensuring that the 183 affected households living at Elmwood and McBride housing complexes in Cairo, Illinois, will have the full support of HUD as they transition to new housing.

“Cairo is Exhibit A in mismanagement in Washington and locally. It is a disaster. You’ve made the right decision to get rid of these old housing units. But there’s an obvious question in Cairo, Illinois: what’s next? I need to make sure that you have a vision of what you want these families to have when it’s over. What can we promise these residents today?” Durbin asked Sec. Carson.

Durbin continued, **“If we are not careful, HUD can kill this community. And here’s what I mean. If we had all of the people in those two units leave Cairo, Illinois, it would cut the school enrollment in half. That would be the end of the school system and it would truly be the end of the community. So I’m starting with the premise if you want to stay, and if we can find you a safe and clean place to stay, I feel an obligation to try and help you reach that goal.”**

Secretary Carson promised that the families in the public housing complexes in Cairo will be able to either stay in safe, clean, affordable housing in Cairo, Illinois, or move to any other location in the U.S. He also committed to ensuring that HUD staff is on-the-ground to help counsel the families and individuals on their options.

Durbin then pressed Sec. Carson for an internal review of the department's oversight of the Alexander County Housing Authority (ACHA) – outside of the HUD Inspector General (IG) review.

“The mismanagement that occurred locally has resulted in a report – they are facing bankruptcy, disillusionment, everything went wrong and people should be held accountable for it. But not just in Illinois or Alexander County. People should be held accountable in Washington, who were overseeing this project. Are you willing to commit to an internal review so that if there was wrong-doing within the Department of Housing and Urban Development, that can become public as well?” Durbin asked.

Sec. Carson committed to this and said that this situation was completely unacceptable and that HUD plans to take care of it.

Video of Durbin's remarks before the subcommittee are available [here](#).

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Following an August 2015 report by *The Southern Illinoisan* entitled “Chaos in Cairo,” which found that the quality of life for residents at Alexander County Housing Authority (ACHA) had deteriorated and hundreds of thousands of federal dollars had been misused, Durbin joined with U.S. Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL) in [calling on HUD](#) to investigate the allegations. Following that letter, HUD announced that it would be taking possession of ACHA.

Since the takeover, Senator Durbin has met with ACHA staff, tenants, and community activists to discuss the unsafe living conditions at Elmwood and McBride housing complexes in Cairo, Illinois, and his staff has worked closely with HUD and ACHA to address resident's concerns.

In April, HUD announced it would make housing vouchers available to residents of the Elmwood and McBride and that it would also offer relocation counseling to the 183 affected households, helping relocate them to available nearby public housing or public housing anywhere in the United States. Just before that announcement, Sens. Durbin and Duckworth had [pressed](#) HUD Secretary Ben Carson to decide on a course for the future of the Alexander County Housing Authority (ACHA) developments as soon as possible and to meet with ACHA residents throughout the decision-making process to make sure their concerns and needs are adequately addressed.