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NASW withholds support of confirmation of Dr. Ben Carson to lead HUD

Carson has no discernible qualifications to lead U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) withholds its support of the confirmation of Dr. Ben Carson to be the next secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) because he has no discernible qualifications to manage an agency of such magnitude and complexity.

It is crucial that HUD have a qualified leader. The agency oversees housing programs, policies and initiatives that are critical for clients who are low or moderate income, especially those who are persons of color.

The emergence of HUD as a cabinet-level agency has historical significance. Its creation was precipitated by civil rights advocacy and activism during the 1960s that brought attention to the deplorable state of some housing in cities and rural areas.

HUD was launched in 1965 after passage of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Act. The Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968 to combat housing discrimination and the HUD secretary was deemed responsible for implementing and enforcing the directives of this law.

Both legislative actions effectively changed the nation's approach to housing policy and creating housing opportunities for low and moderate income families and individuals.

For the last half century incoming Republican and Democratic presidents sought to appoint individuals that had either been elected officials who had direct experience with large-scale housing initiatives or those who were experts in housing policies and planning.

Indeed, the first HUD Secretary was Robert C. Weaver, an African American who had extensive academic and administrative experience in dealing with the nation's housing problems. President John F. Kennedy in 1960 appointed Mr. Weaver to head the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency. President Lyndon B. Johnson named him head of newly created HUD in 1966.

Given the qualifications of many of his predecessors NASW finds it risky to appoint someone such as Dr. Carson who is so lacking in the credentials and commitment to head the department and uphold HUD's housing mandate.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition perhaps said it best when it stated, "Carson's lack of expertise in housing issues is a mockery of HUD and its far-reaching urban policy efforts—but for HUD, it's also nothing new. Since the agency's inception, the government has charged HUD with carrying out a litany of important tasks with very few resources. Carson's appointment is unsettling, but it merely marks the latest chapter of a long history of limiting HUD's capacity to tackle urban inequality and provide housing assistance to low-income residents."

The reality is that over the years HUD's capacity to address the nation's housing needs have been limited by politicians, which makes the appointment of Dr. Carson so significant.

By all reports, Dr. Carson has made public statements about low-income housing that suggest he is far less a champion of maintaining the fair housing standards and the housing safety-net than NASW would hope.

For example, in a 2015 written statement about disparate impact that was related to subsidized housing in wealthy areas and suburban segregation, Dr. Carson disparaged the current HUD Secretary Julian Castro's fair housing position as being "a government engineered attempt to legislate racial equality." Such a point of view is contrary to what NASW and others expect from HUD's leadership.

We must not lose sight of the fact that HUD is responsible for funding and overseeing seminal and innovative programs including the Continuum of Care program that provides for comprehensive services to prevent and end homelessness.

HUD also provides funds to states for the Section 8 Housing Choice voucher program. Section 8 is HUD's largest rental assistance program that serves people who are low income. Local Housing Authorities are responsible for administering Section 8 housing voucher allocations. Approximately 3.3 million low-income families use either Housing Choice vouchers or Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance.

NASW finds Dr. Carson's experience wanting and his stated positions on issues of fair housing and subsidized housing raise serious concerns.

However, should Dr. Carson become the next Secretary of HUD we believe he has a responsibility to become knowledgeable about the absolute necessity to maintain and even expand essential HUD programs such as homeless Continuum of Care, Section 8 Housing Choice and the many other housing programs targeted at rural, suburban and urban areas.

He must also recognize the historical importance of HUD's mandate to ensure that low and moderate income Americans have access to safe affordable housing that meets high standards of livability.

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The [National Association of Social Workers](#) (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with more than 125,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.