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Congress of the United States
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December 19, 2019

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

Secretary Carson:

We write to request vital information from the Department of Housing and Urban Development on the safety of public housing residents in our state and across the nation. As you are aware, just last month, a public housing high-rise apartment building in the Minneapolis neighborhood of Cedar Riverside suffered a devastating tragedy when a fire broke out the day before Thanksgiving. Five people lost their lives that day and more remain in the hospital, recovering from their injuries and the serious effects of smoke inhalation.

Sadly, the building was not fully outfitted with fire sprinklers, having been constructed decades before regulations were put into place requiring such safety equipment in all residences. The presence of sprinklers could have made a real difference in the Cedar Riverside tragedy, considering that statistics show that the death rate in home fires is 81% lower when sprinklers are present.

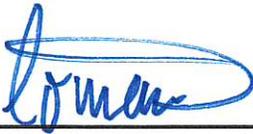
The federal government has a duty to protect the safety and security of public housing residents. But we cannot properly uphold that duty without an accurate accounting of what hazards are threatening these facilities, particularly in cases like this one - where the hazard may not be categorized by the Capital Needs Assessment or other maintenance-need inventories due to the retrofit exemptions.

We request that your agency conduct a complete assessment of the nation's public housing stock to determine how many facilities are currently exempted from the sprinkler requirements established under the Fire Administration Authorization Act of 1992 and further, how many units in these facilities have been retrofitted despite the exemption. In addition to reporting on the overall number of units that currently lack a sprinkler system, we also request that you share with us the estimated amount of federal funding needed to bring all facilities into compliance with current sprinkler system regulations and ensure that residents are protected regardless of when their property was built.

There are more than 20,000 publicly-owned units operated in our state, providing homes to 36,000 Minnesotans and families. They are counting on the government to help keep them safe and prevent another senseless tragedy like what happened in Cedar Riverside last month. We look forward to hearing from your agency on the scope of the upgrades needed in order to help public housing residents across the country feel safer under their own roof.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Dean Phillips
Member of Congress