

June ___, 2015

The Honorable Julian Castro
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Re: HUD-FASH Demonstration Project

Dear Secretary Castro:

The State of Ohio's Congressional delegation is requesting that HUD create a demonstration project that addresses the high rate of homelessness of former foster youth by adopting the Foster Alumni Supporting Housing program (FASH). The HUD-FASH program would serve the most vulnerable homeless foster care alumni through a Housing First approach that would combine housing choice voucher rental assistance with case management and clinical services. The primary goal of this program would be to prevent homelessness for this vulnerable population, and to lay the foundation for future housing stability and life success.

Former foster youth lack ongoing parental support during a critical time of transition into young adulthood, and often the foster care experience has not adequately prepared them with opportunities for self-sufficiency skill building and guidance towards life skills preparation. Studies of this group and statistics for this vulnerable population yield disturbing results. Housing instability undermines the potential of former foster youth to pursue post-secondary education and employment at a livable wage, is detrimental to their physical and emotional health, and increases their vulnerability to crime and substance addiction. A critical component of FASH will be supporting foster alumni who are seeking higher education, job training, or vocational education opportunities.

Chapin Hall's Midwest research study demonstrates that by age 26, 36% of former foster youth experience homelessness. One in four will experience post traumatic stress disorder. Only one half will be employed at age 24. Less than 3% will earn a college degree. Over 70% of young women will be pregnant by age 21. We can creatively chip away at this trend with a demonstration project for this population that applies principles from programs with a proven track record.

The HUD-FASH proposal is based on the successful track record of the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supporting Housing (HUD-VASH) program, which combines Housing Choice Vouchers with rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. These services are provided to participating veterans at VA medical centers and community-based outreach clinics. Similarly, a key component of the HUD-FASH program would be case management service, designed to improve the foster alumni's ability to achieve and maintain stable housing in the future.

The programs are comparable in large part because the issues impacting both targeted groups are similar. Both foster care alumni and veterans have been entrusted to the government when it comes to their care. Both experience PTSD. Former foster children are almost twice as likely to suffer

from PTSD as war veterans according to a study released by the Harvard Medical School and the University of Michigan and Casey Family Programs.

Foster care alumni participants in the HUD-FASH program will be assigned a case manager. Together, they will develop a transition housing plan that identifies housing needs and set self-sufficiency goals that will require active participation by the alumni. This plan should reflect each alumni's barriers, needs and goals. The alumni and case manager will review and revise the plan on a regular basis based on goals achieved and identified needs. Alumni participation in this process is a means of achieving self-sufficiency, as the goal is for participants to graduate from the program with an Individual Development Account for the purpose of future housing stability.

Ohio should pilot a HUD-FASH demonstration project because of our State's level of need. WE have three of the top counties for numbers of "aging out" youth. Over 1,000 young people emancipate from the Ohio foster care system annually at the age of 18 and face the adult world without support. Ohio has not yet extended foster care until age 21. We also rank 50th in state supported child welfare funding.

Ohio has statewide and county support. We have public housing authorities with a proven track record nationally for HUD-VASH utilization. The demonstration project would be incumbent upon State and local officials where the project exists to assemble supportive services for the foster alumnus receiving services. Nonprofits throughout the state would participate in this effort, such as Lighthouse Youth Services, which is nationally recognized for its work with runaway and homeless youth supportive services and its system of tiered housing for transitional youth ages 18-24, YWCA Cleveland and the Ohio Benefit Bank to name a few.

We would ask that HUD create the HUD-FASH program as quickly as possible and then devote 1,000 vouchers to it and monitor its results.

While we believe Federal law permits you to establish this program, we are open to discussion concerning any legal impediments you believe that may exist. If that is the case, we will work with you on a legislative solution. We look forward to your thoughtful consideration on this and to getting this demonstration project moving forward.

Sincerely,

The Ohio Congressional Delegation