



February 4, 2021

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge, Esq.  
Secretary Designate  
US Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge,

On behalf of ACTION Ohio, the Ohio Youth Advisory Board, and the National Center for Housing & Child Welfare we write to offer our congratulations on your appointment to lead the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). We hope that you will be able to find some time on your schedule to meet with foster youth and alumni virtually or, if Covid-19 restrictions allow it, in person this spring.

It is an extraordinary coming together of circumstances that you are assuming leadership of HUD exactly as HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) prepares plans to implement the **Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act** (FSHO), a program which will immediately carry forward your legacy of ending homelessness among youth aging out of foster care and closing the racial wealth gap. Largely due to the efforts of your colleague and friend, Sen. Brown, FSHO was included in the Omnibus Appropriations Act and became law in December 2020. Under your leadership we have no doubt that the foster youth and alumni who authored FSHO will be included in the immediate and long-term implementation efforts of the PIH Team.

It is also poignant and a remarkable coincidence that FSHO was written by foster youth and alumni from your home state and city, many of whom learned the intricacies of public policy from you and your staff. This includes your "shadows" from the Annual Foster Youth Shadow Day Experience organized by Rep. Bass and the Congressional Foster Youth Caucus, Violet Ramunni of Cleveland (2014), Jenny Konrath of Dayton (2013), and Alexander McFarland of Cincinnati (2012).

Alex wrote about his "whirlwind of activity" with you and your staff in this Youth Today article: <https://youthtoday.org/2015/05/foster-youth-gaining-their-voice-but-still-need-adult-allies/> "We went through several sets of training; a few of us even went behind the scenes on Capitol Hill; and I was present for the release of a bill designed to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. When I got home it was all I could talk about. I felt empowered. I felt invincible. I had a voice."

As you know, it took these young people more than six years of painstaking research and advocacy to arrive at the elegantly straightforward solution included in FSHO. By eliminating geographic disparities and synchronizing HUD's Family Unification Program with a child's journey through the child welfare system, FSHO allows all

PHAs in the United States to offer housing and supportive services to youth aging out of foster care when a young person needs them. FSHO eliminates endemic bureaucratic flaws in the Housing Choice Voucher program and instead offers an “on demand” vouchers that close the gaps between systems through which more than 5,000 foster youth predictably fall into homelessness each year. FSHO accomplishes exactly what you called upon public housing agencies to do in your response to Sen. Cortez-Masto during your confirmation hearing regarding youth homelessness. More specifically FSHO:

- offers a three-year Family Unification Program Housing Choice Voucher Housing to all young people leaving foster care who are at risk of homelessness, timed with emancipation;
- eliminates geographic disparities by offering a voucher to youth regardless of where youth live in the US;
- offers youth the opportunity to build wealth through an escrow account to bank increases in their rent and extend the voucher by two years (for a total of five) by voluntarily participating in HUD’s Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) or other FSS-like activities.

FSHO allows child welfare agencies nationwide to add a viable and predictable housing option for young people emancipating from foster care who are at risk of homelessness. In 2019, the U.S. Children’s Bureau reported that while only four percent of all children in foster care had a goal of aging out into independence, older youth emancipated at twice that rate in 2019. This means that last year, child welfare agencies failed to find permanency of any kind for 20,445 young people<sup>1</sup> and these youth entered adulthood without being returned home or finding a forever family through adoption.

Thus, sadly, all foster youth fall into the example you offered Sen. Cotton in response to his request for instruction on the difference between equity and equality in the distribution of government resources: they do not have wealthy parents who can contribute towards a nest egg upon which they can build their future. This has serious implications for each young person’s individual economic security, and it exacerbates societal racial inequity as well. Seventy-five percent of young people who emancipate are youth of color and regardless of a young person’s race or ethnicity, foster youth disproportionately reside in neighborhoods that have been stripped of wealth, infrastructure, and opportunity for years due to flawed government policies.

As such, we are proud of the fact that FSHO offers a platform for youth, and particularly youth of color, to build economic self-sufficiency. Through the provision of housing resources and access to FSS, FSHO will help to close the yawning wealth

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<sup>1</sup> United States Children’s Bureau. (2020). The AFCARS Report 27. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.

gap that you aim to address in your role as Secretary. Former foster youth in HUD's FSS Program are offered the opportunity to become homeowners including NCHCW Communications Consultant, Adaora Onuora. Despite entering foster care at the age of 15 after the death of her mother and aging out alone at age 21, Adaora graduated with a double major in communications and criminal justice from Bowie State University this past December, is working full-time, and is on track to purchase her own home in Laurel, MD in 2022.

Finally, we wanted to note that Deputy Assistant Secretary Danielle Bastarache and her PIH Team including Becky Primeaux, Steven Durham, Ryan Jones, and Michelle Daniels have already created and tested the distribution mechanism necessary to implement FSHO without delay. In 2019, PIH implemented a proposal written by the youth that urged HUD to activate the features within FSHO which were within their administrative discretion. This included everything within FSHO except automatic access to HUD's FSS Program and the associated two-year extension of the subsidy. The youth's proposal was implemented in 2019 and renamed the Foster Youth to Independence Initiative (FYI). The PIH team met regularly with youth and included ACTION Ohio in the implementation and training involved with expanding FYI nationwide. As a result, more than 1,000 youth have already acquired their own apartments and are thriving through the distribution of three-year, "on demand" FUP vouchers in increments as small as one to any PHA in the US capable of administering HCVs.

The commitment of the PIH Team to the success of FYI and to authentic partnership with the foster youth who authored and delivered the concept to HUD has been unwavering. To honor their commitment to FYI we nominated Ryan Jones, Michelle Daniels, and Charles Eldridge for the 2021 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal. We are confident that they will win this award and we anticipate working with them just as closely on FSHO implementation as we did on FYI.

We hope to hear from your staff soon to arrange a meeting with foster youth and alumni. If your staff has any questions or would like to discuss dates for a meeting, they may wish to contact Lisa Dickson, alumna and Communications Director of ACTION Ohio at 614-787-5287 or [lisa@fosteractionohio.org](mailto:lisa@fosteractionohio.org).

With admiration and appreciation,

Ruth White, MSSA  
Executive Director, NCHCW  
ACTION Ohio

Jamole Callahan, BA  
Director of Training & Development,

cc: General Deputy Assistant Secretary, Dominique Bloom