

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Castro:

Thank you for your recent visit to Portland, OR to discuss the affordable housing and homelessness challenges facing West Coast cities. We are writing in support of Home Forward, Washington County and Clackamas County housing authorities' recent request for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to approve amended Fair Market Rent (FMR) per the outcome of the agencies' FMR survey conducted by Washington State University. This request is supported by data which shows a 21 percent increase in market rents above the established 2015 HUD Fair Market Rents. We urge you to act quickly to approve these increased Fair Market Rents for the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Home Forward.

This adjustment is much needed for this region, where rents are among the fastest rising in the country, and the vacancy rate for affordable rental properties ranges between one and four percent depending on the neighborhood. These sharp increases in rental housing costs make it especially difficult for housing assistance voucher holders to find affordable housing quickly, and to be able to continue to afford their existing voucher-supported housing. The success rate for voucher-holders in the region is at only 73.5 percent, a concerning level that is continuing to drop.

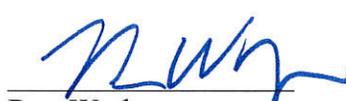
Additionally, we are concerned that Portland's artificially low FMR will undermine your renewed effort to encourage integrated communities, where all Americans have equal access to opportunity. An inaccurate FMR will further relegate voucher-holders to impoverished neighborhoods. Correcting this FMR payment standard will ensure that these vouchers can be used in diverse communities across our region, where voucher holders will have access to transportation choices and economic opportunities.

We ask that HUD act quickly to accept the results of this study and post them to the Federal Register in order for Housing Assistance Vouchers, Emergency Solutions and Continuum of Care programs to better serve the residents of this region. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
US Senator



Jeff Merkley
US Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress