

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 9, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Fudge:

I write to express my wishes for the next steps to guarantee safe and sanitary living conditions for my constituents at Hilltop Village Apartments in Jacksonville, Florida under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) program.

As you know, after receiving outreach directly from affected residents, my staff visited Hilltop Village Apartments on May 3, 2021. During these visits, my staff met with tenants and found disturbing evidence of a uniquely severe rodent infestation in all fourteen buildings, as well as garbage overflow throughout the property. Furthermore, this property had not undergone a Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspection since December 2, 2015, to which the lack of oversight allowed the rodent infestation to grow to chronic levels and is a violation of federal regulation. As such, on May 4, 2021, I wrote to you to request that an emergency Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspection, and a Management and Occupancy Review (MOR) be conducted, as well as the enforcement of any applicable penalties on ownership and management.

On May 5, 2021, the City of Jacksonville Code Enforcement inspected the property, where numerous additional violations were discovered, including electrical problems, broken appliances, and other unsafe and unsanitary conditions, which amounted to 286 violations. On May 12, 2021, Hilltop Village Apartments was inspected and received a REAC inspection score of 61c/100, indicating potentially life-threatening conditions but just marginally above a failing score. Furthermore, ownership and management were subjected to over \$160,000 in civil penalties and four units were declared uninhabitable. Additionally, on June 28, 2021, I requested REAC inspections and MORs for all properties throughout the State of Florida operated by Cambridge Management, Inc., which is responsible for seven other troubled properties with failing REAC scores, in addition to Hilltop Village Apartments.

The REAC inspection reported that, while the structural integrity of the property was compliant with federal standards, the inhabited units received shockingly low scores with significant health and safety deductions due to the widespread presence of insect and rodent infestations, chronic mold, broken appliances, and general disrepair of units. In spite of these

conditions, the property is considered narrowly passing. These results bring into question whether the current inspection scoring methodology is sufficient at ensuring that tenants are provided with decent, safe, and sanitary housing.

Uniform Physical Condition Standards (UPCS) inspections of properties should be reformed to reflect the exigent health and safety conditions that residents must navigate. This would include the prioritization of health and safety conditions, incorporating tenant surveys on unit conditions, and abatement of unsafe and unsanitary units at properties from Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contracts. Furthermore, HUD should reform MORs to consider responsiveness to remediating deficiencies noted by local code enforcement and Demand for Corrective Actions.

Hilltop Village Apartments also continues to be the location of prevalent and violent crime, including a shooting that took place in broad daylight on October 14, 2020 that injured two individuals. A shooting took place on November 20, 2020 that injured two individuals, and a July 20, 2021 shooting that injured three individuals, as well as ongoing burglaries and theft issues. Families who live in HUD-assisted properties deserve protection, and I request that the Department review actions by Cambridge Management, Inc. on precautionary security efforts to keep residents safe from violent crime.

It is unacceptable that residents at Hilltop Village Apartments continue to live under unsafe and unsanitary conditions, including the severe rodent infestation and ongoing violent crime. As such, I further request that directly affected tenants be safely relocated, that a follow-up REAC inspection take place to ensure that the rodent infestation has been completely resolved, and that inhabited units are decent, safe, and sanitary.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to continuing to work with HUD to protect the people and families at Hilltop Village Apartments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator