

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Tim Scott
717 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Scott:

Columbia Housing is reaching out to our Congressional Delegation to request your assistance in securing immediate statutory relief from the two administrative requirements described below. Continued compliance with these requirements creates an immediate threat to our staff and the residents we serve and is in direct opposition to the guidelines set forth to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Housing Choice Voucher Program Housing Quality Standard Inspections

Current regulations require inspections to be performed prior to approval of a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract and biennial inspections to be conducted for all units under an active HAP contract. Regulations prohibit payment of any housing assistance if inspection requirements have not been met and require HUD to recoup any funds used to make HAP payments on units that have not been inspected.

Columbia Housing has implemented all regulatory relief made available by HUD but statutory requirements of continued pre-inspection and biennial inspections pose an immediate threat.

Relief Sought:

1. Waive the pre-inspection requirement which will allow housing assistance to be provided to families immediately. Landlords would provide a self-certification stating that the unit complies with all federal Housing Quality Standards. Allow PHA's up to 12 months to conduct a post-occupancy inspection on any unit that cannot currently be inspected.
2. Waive the biennial inspection requirement and change it to a triennial inspection requirement. This will allow PHA's an additional 12 months to inspect units currently under HAP contract.

Annual Agency Plan Public Hearing and Resident Advisory Board (RAB) Meetings

Current regulations require a minimum 45-day public notice and posting of PHA Annual Plans. In addition, PHA's are required to conduct a public hearing, resident meetings and a meeting with the RAB. While technology can provide some solutions to meeting requirements, many of the families we serve do not have access to the necessary tools to participate in "virtual" meetings.

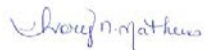
Relief Sought:

1. Waive the public hearing and resident meeting requirements and allow both the general public as well as residents to submit written comments; e-mail comments; or, voice mail comments on a designated phone and TDD line to facilitate ADA needs. PHA's would post responses to all comments on their website and at designated public locations.

The relief requested above will enable us to continue to provide housing assistance to families that more than ever in these uncertain times, need immediate assistance and at the same time protect the safety of our staff. The requested relief still enables meaningful public and resident participation in PHA plans while adhering to social distancing standards set forth in the COVID-19 guidelines.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you again for your continued support of affordable housing for the families of South Carolina. We look forward to continued dialogue and if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at imathews@columbiahousing.org, (w) 803.234.3886 ext. 211 or (c) 803.667.0267.

Sincerely,



Ivory N. Mathews
Interim Executive Director

Copy:

Columbia Housing's - Board of Commissioners

Danielle Gibbs, Upstate Regional Director, Senator Tim Scott's Greenville Office

Alex Smith, Legislative Correspondent, Senator Tim Scott's Capitol Hill Office

Lila Nieves-Lee, Legislative Assistant, Senator Tim Scott's Capitol Hill Office