

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2020

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Securing affordable and safe housing is a challenge for millions of Americans, particularly those who face access and functional needs, like persons with disabilities. Through its Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides millions of households with the opportunity to live in safe and affordable homes and communities. HUD's programs subsidize rents for lower-income households and HUD's policies are designed to ensure that the homes its beneficiaries rent are safe and sanitary.

Further, under the Fair Housing Act, as amended, HUD and the housing agencies that help administer its programs must accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities who rent Public Housing units or privately-owned units through the Housing Choice Voucher program, either by offering accessible units or providing alternatives and reasonable accommodations.

Despite these requirements, and the recommendations of the National Council on Disabilities,¹ many cities, have a limited supply of affordable and accessible units for persons with disabilities. For example, in 2019, HUD and the City of Los Angeles entered into an agreement to provide accessibility improvements throughout the City's affordable housing program, including the construction of 10,000 new accessible units over the next 10 years. Additionally, a 2017 study conducted by the University of Chicago found that the distribution of affordable and accessible units in Chicago was uneven and limited, resulting in higher prices and less housing choice for persons with disabilities in the Chicago-region.

HUD's agreement with Los Angeles and the 2017 study raise significant concerns about HUD and housing agencies' ability to serve the particular needs of persons with disabilities. Also, through their municipal housing departments, many large cities fund and oversee the development of

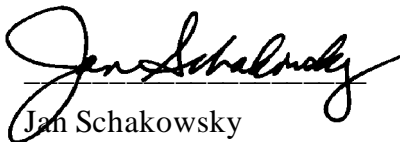
¹ See "The State of Housing in America in the 21st Century: A Disability Perspective, National Council on Disabilities, Jan. 19, 2010, at <https://ncd.gov/publications/2010/Jan192010>.

thousands of affordable rental housing units, usually in the form of apartment buildings. This inquiry seeks to determine whether such units are complying with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act and the Fair Housing Act. As a result, I would like GAO to explore:

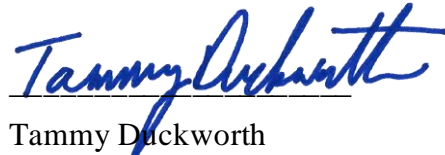
1. How does HUD oversee public housing agencies' implementation of requirements to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination when applying for or living in public housing?
2. What is the inventory of accessible public housing units in the twenty-five largest metropolitan areas in the US? What is the estimated gap between households requiring assistance and available units in those areas?
3. What are the processes that housing authorities follow to help voucher-assisted households with disabilities find accessible units or retrofit non-accessible units? What happens if a voucher-holder is not able to find an accessible unit?
4. What are the twenty-five largest metropolitan areas, including Chicago and St. Louis, doing to accommodate the housing needs of low-income households with disabilities?
5. How does HUD promote, catalog, and work to increase housing for people with disabilities?

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Kate Durkin in Representative Schakowsky's office at kate.durkin@mail.house.gov or Alex Johnson in Senator Duckworth's Office at Alex_Johnson@duckworth.senate.gov.

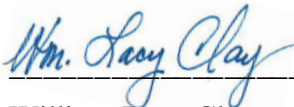
Sincerely,



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress
Chair of the House Energy and Commerce
Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee



Tammy Duckworth
U.S. Senator



William Lacy Clay
Member of Congress
Chair of the House Financial Services
Housing, Community Development &
Insurance Subcommittee