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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

March 8, 2017

Via Electronic Transmission

The Honorable Dr. Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). I look forward to working with you on housing issues raised in our January meeting and other issues of concern.

A recent news report in *The Buffalo News* found that the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) has spent in excess of \$120,000 on travel since 2013 for staff and commissioners to attend various conferences and seminars across the country.¹ According to the article, staff and commissioners often attend the same conferences for the same organizations year after year, and often attend multiple conferences in a single year. The housing authority pays for transportation, food, lodging and conference fees for each attendee which can add up to thousands of dollars per person per trip.

Additionally, these trips have amounted to hundreds of man hours spent away from the office and not serving the citizens of Buffalo. According to the article, the BMHA executive director has spent 158 days over four years attending conferences.² While BMHA may argue the necessity for the conferences, I believe that having an executive director gone an average of two additional months per year is a strain on the housing authority.

¹ Susan Schulman; "Executive Director not only BMHA official who travels"; *The Buffalo News*; February 6, 2017; <http://buffalonews.com/2017/02/06/others-bmha-travel/> .

² Susan Schulman; "Concerns mount over BMHA chief's heave travel schedule"; *The Buffalo News*; February 6, 2017; <https://buffalonews.com/2017/02/03/bmha-chief-away-conventions-158-days-four-years/> .

While I appreciate that housing authority administrators want to ensure that they have the proper training, I am much more concerned that taxpayer dollars are being spent on trips and excessive fees rather than on the programs themselves. Please provide the following information for the BMHA:

1. Please provide, in Excel format, a list of conferences each staff and board member attended. Please also describe the procedures used to verify the reasonableness of conference expenditures.
2. For each conference, please provide a list of the expenses, in Excel spreadsheet form, incurred by each attendee that were paid by or reimbursed with housing authority funding, including but not limited to: hotel room, transportation (including mode of transportation), meals and incidentals, as well as a complete list of swag provided to the attendees.
3. The complete annual compensation packages of all BMHA employees, including salaries, bonuses and any other compensation (health care, retirement, etc).
4. Provide a copy of most recent employment contracts for the executive director and all BMHA financial statements filed with HUD, including any statements made about executive director salary and all benefits.
5. Please document the total number of credit cards issued to BMHA, including any provided to BMHA Board members.
6. Provide all legal bills and professional service and consulting fees paid by BMHA. Please also document all conflict of interest waivers granted by HUD.
7. Please provide a list of all take-home vehicles provided by BMHA and the names of the employees who drive them.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. I would appreciate your response by March 24, 2017. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Janet Drew of my staff at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Cc: The Honorable David A. Montoya
Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee

The Honorable Susan Collins, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jack Reed, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Tim Scott, Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs

The Honorable Robert Menendez, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs