July 3, 2019

Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Regulations Division, Office of General Counsel  
451 7th Street SW, Room 10276  
Washington, DC 20410

RE: Housing and Community Development Act of 1980: Verification of Eligible Status

To: The Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Colorado Health Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on its proposed rule: Housing and Community Development Act of 1980: Verification of Eligible Status.

The Colorado Health Foundation is the state’s largest private foundation and the third-largest foundation focused on health in the nation. We work closely with partners in the private, public and nonprofit sectors to bring health in reach for all Coloradans. Our work is grounded in serving Coloradans who have low income and historically have had less power or privilege; putting the creation of health equity at the center of everything we do, as well as ensuring that our work is being informed by the community and those we exist to serve.

Housing is a key social determinant of health and plays a critical role in bringing health in reach for all Coloradans. Currently, Colorado, like most of the nation, is experiencing a significant affordable housing crisis. Recent data shows that 50 percent of renter households statewide are cost burdened with more than 30 percent of their income going towards housing costs. ¹ Furthermore, as reported in a 2018 poll the Colorado Health Foundation conducted with the Kaiser Family Foundation, three in ten Coloradans indicated that they were worried they might lose their home because they were unable to afford their rent or mortgage in the coming year. We know that if a household is spending too much of its income on rent or mortgage payments, there is much less money available for other key essentials such as food and medical care, which can contribute to poorer health for low-income individuals and families.

While we share with HUD the concern that millions of U.S. households struggle to find affordable housing in the ongoing nationwide housing crisis, we strongly disagree that the proposed rule is a solution to this challenge. Forcing families with mixed citizenship status from their homes will directly increase the risk of homelessness for these families and thousands more. HUD’s own analysis shows that more than 55,000 children who are U.S. citizens or who are otherwise eligible to receive housing benefits could

¹ https://assets.website-files.com/5e40c8bb42d689da7f3465/5cc8413c596643836645814_Housing%20Unaffordability_Final_Report_1_1.26.18-compressed.pdf

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face eviction under this proposed rule. Separating families from stable housing will only lead to the erosion of healthy and safe neighborhoods and communities.

We believe that the proposed rule will not reduce the number of people on waiting lists for affordable housing, nor will it reduce the number of subsides provided to families. This proposed rule change would harm struggling families who are currently complying with federal law, forcing them to either break up their family or face dislocation from the places they call home. We believe this proposed rule change directly contradicts HUD’s goals of providing affordable housing opportunities to those in need.

The Colorado Health Foundation believes that a safe, accessible and affordable place to call home is a basic human right. We are greatly concerned about the effect this proposed rule will have on families all across the state. The housing assistance programs administered by HUD are often the only way a family can maintain a roof over their heads. If finalized as written, the proposed rule will certainly continue to engender fear and uncertainty among immigrants and their families, and place greater demands on local shelters and emergency assistance groups that are already operating at their maximum capacity because of the displacement of thousands of families. Additionally, as proposed, the changes to this rule would be administratively burdensome to implement for local housing authorities. It would divert already-limited resources away from needs like property upkeep and resident services to go towards enforcement, eligibility verifications and evictions. These unnecessary administrative burdens would ultimately result in fewer eligible families receiving assistance to secure the housing they need to be healthy.

To address our affordable housing crisis and ensure everyone has safe and affordable place to call home, we urge HUD not to adopt this proposed rule change and instead to focus on making significant new investments in affordable housing resources across the country in ways that equitably serve the needs of low-income communities.

We thank you for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, please contact Sara Monge, Colorado Health Foundation public policy officer, at smonge@coloradohealth.org or 303-953-3664.

Sincerely,

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