



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

March 28, 2019

The Honorable Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., M.D.
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

On January 17, 2019, two South Carolinians tragically lost their lives in entirely preventable deaths. Calvin Witherspoon Jr. and Derrick Caldwell Roper died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning in Columbia's Allen Benedict Court public housing. When fire authorities investigated, they discovered unusually high gas levels in at least 65 units coming out of water heaters, stoves and other appliances. Over 400 tenants were then evicted from their homes due to extremely unsafe conditions.

Unfortunately, this type of incident is not isolated to Columbia, South Carolina. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 50,000 people go to the emergency room every year due to carbon monoxide poisoning. The most vulnerable of our population are the most at risk, including children, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. Tragically, over 430 people die as a result of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Specifically in public housing, NBC News reported 11 deaths related to carbon monoxide since 2003.

While the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in homes, particularly in sleeping areas, HUD's inspection guidelines do not account for the presence or maintenance of carbon monoxide detectors in public housing. As the recent deaths demonstrate, more action is clearly required to keep public housing residents safe and healthy.

We are writing to inquire what HUD is doing to ensure that all dwelling units receiving federal assistance are in compliance with the local laws and/or ordinances concerning carbon monoxide detection alarms for the jurisdiction the dwelling unit is located in. Additionally, please provide information on when HUD plans to finalize amendments to Uniform Physical Conditions Standards (UPCS) to better reflect safety concerns like carbon monoxide detectors.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to receiving your response, including how HUD intends to address these ongoing concerns.

Sincerely,

Tim Scott
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator