

# National Alliance of HUD Tenants

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To: Biden-Harris Transition Team

Date: November 22, 2020

From: Geraldine Collins, President  
Michael Kane, Executive Director

BY EMAIL

Cc: Rep. Maxine Waters, Chair, House Financial Services Committee  
Senator Sherrod Brown, Ranking Member, Senate Banking Committee

RE: Support for Diane Yentel as Secretary of the US Department of Housing  
and Urban Development

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT), we write in strong support of Diane Yentel, President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

NAHT is the tenants' union representing the 1.7 million households in privately-owned, HUD multifamily housing, and is the only national tenant membership coalition in the US. Since 1992, NAHT has been generally recognized by HUD, Congress and housing stakeholders as the representative voice for HUD assisted tenants. Governed by an all tenant, elected Board, NAHT's voting membership consists of tenant associations that meet HUD standards for legitimate tenant organizations and associated nonprofit areawide tenant assistance organizations in 17 states. Our mission is to preserve and improve HUD assisted housing through tenant empowerment and participation in decisions affecting our homes.

When reports emerged that Diane Yentel was being considered for the critical post of HUD Secretary, our Board members reacted with excitement and enthusiasm. What a perfect choice! NAHT's leaders have worked with Ms. Yentel for more than 15 years, including her earlier stints at HUD and NLIHC, and throughout her leadership at NLIHC. At HUD, we would finally have an ally to help realize NAHT's vision of tenants as partners with HUD in the oversight of the nation's multi-billion investment in assisted housing. In a word, Diane Yentel "gets it."

NLIHC was already well established as the premier national organization for low-income housing when Ms. Yentel took its helm in 2016. Since that time, she has masterfully broadened the Coalition's scope and impact. From the outset, her weekly Memo to Members essays have been consistently thoughtful, eloquent, and powerful, serving both to educate and inspire. Her choice of topics is always timely and serves to take the national dialogue about housing needs to the next level. They reflect an uncommon, higher strategic arc.

Ms. Yentel has amplified these messages through a brilliant use of social and mainstream media. Under her leadership, the Coalition has almost singlehandedly raised the profile of affordable housing needs in mainstream public discourse. She has seized the platform offered by NLIHC conferences and forums, to invite bipartisan Congressional, academic and journalistic thought leaders to highlight key messages and win commitments about the housing issues of the day. The NLIHC's research branch has augmented this with timely, in-depth research on housing needs, problems and solutions, building on NLIHC's annual "Out of Reach" reports.

As a direct result, the number of mainstream and social media stories on the nation's affordable housing crisis have exploded exponentially over the past five years. For the first time in history, affordable housing became a major issue in this year's elections; every Democratic Presidential campaign proposed bold, major platforms to address the housing crisis. This had never happened before. The ground has now been prepared for major investments in affordable housing, as outlined in the Biden-Harris platform. It would be fitting if Ms. Yentel, who largely spearheaded this achievement, were selected to implement this breakthrough in the months ahead.

In her articles, speeches and organizational leadership, Ms. Yentel has evinced an encyclopedic knowledge of the full range of issues and constituencies addressed by HUD, from public and assisted housing tenants, owners and agencies; financial intermediaries and GSEs; Fair Housing and the needs of the most vulnerable; CDBG and the needs of state and city governments; rural and tribal housing, and more. Her perspective has throughout been informed by a deep awareness and commitment to an anti-racist approach to tackle the inequality and institutional racism entrenched in the US housing system. She is fully prepared to transform HUD from an obstacle to a leader in the fight for racial justice in US housing and neighborhoods.

Under Ms. Yentel's leadership and frequent visits to local groups, the NLIHC has also deepened its ties with community-based organizations in the housing field, including tenant organizations like NAHT; community development, service and homeless advocacy groups; local governments and housing authorities; and virtually all statewide housing advocacy coalitions. The Coalition has rapidly built up its membership and audience for its weekly Memo to Members and Action Alerts, now seen by all as the indispensable lifeline for the entire affordable housing sector. As HUD Secretary, Ms. Yentel would bring with her an unmatched network of local contacts that would immediately transform HUD's reputation and reach.

As part of her long term strategic vision, Ms. Yentel also pioneered outreach to potential allies in other fields and sectors not ordinarily associated with low income housing advocacy, such as health, education, and faith based constituencies. The Coalition raised funds and forged new partnerships with these sectors, to broaden public support and recognize that housing stability is fundamental to public health, stable families, and improved education and employment outcomes. Ms. Yentel is well positioned to lead a multi-sector alliance to implement creative cross-sectoral programs and broaden public support for HUD.

The NLIHC's response to the COVID-19 crisis illustrates Ms. Yentel's strengths as a visionary, imaginative leader. When the crisis hit, Ms. Yentel immediately organized a weekly teleconference call under the auspices of the NLIHC's long-standing Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition. The agenda and invited guest speakers—ranging from HUD officials, Congressional and thought leaders, and "best practice" state and local organizations—reflected an uncanny grasp of what was needed as the crisis unfolded. These calls quickly attracted more than 2,000 participants each week, mostly state, local and national housing organizations, government agencies and activists, but also press, HUD and Congressional staff.

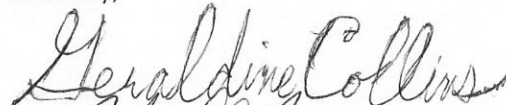
At a time when many felt disoriented and overwhelmed, these calls provided vital information, strategic insights, best practice solutions and moral comfort; they gave strength and purpose to countless isolated practitioners in the field. Ms. Yentel's calm, steady, and capable leadership is exactly what is needed to rebuild HUD, strengthen its relationships with constituency allies and the press, and address the nation's multiple housing crises. Ms. Yentel also has excellent working relationships with many of the key career staff who have held HUD together through the past few years; Ms. Yentel would know what to do to rebuild staff and morale at the beleaguered agency, where she also worked before.

Working with Capitol Hill allies, the Coalition also spearheaded the proposal for \$100 billion in Emergency Renters Relief, based on NLIHC research, and built an effective campaign to win House support. Ms. Yentel's deep relationships with grass roots advocacy groups and bi-partisan Capitol Hill leaders from across the nation makes her the ideal choice at HUD to win Congressional support for affordable housing funding and reforms.

In short, Ms. Yentel has clearly earned her stature as a visionary leader of the US housing movement. She would be poised as HUD Secretary to hit the ground running from Day One to implement President Biden's housing agenda, and to help the Administration marshal the resources to truly tackle America's multiple housing crises. We can think of no other person in the private or public sector better prepared to do this job.

Please do not hesitate to contact Geraldine Collins, NAHT President at [Ms.Gerri3@yahoo.com](mailto:Ms.Gerri3@yahoo.com) (516-425-6723), or Michael Kane, Executive Director at [michaelkane@saveourhomes.org](mailto:michaelkane@saveourhomes.org) (617-233-1885) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Geraldine Collins, President



Michael Kane, Executive Director  
National Alliance of HUD Tenants