

The Virgin Islands Consortium

HUD, DHS Launch Joint Effort Targeting Illegal Immigration in Federal Housing Programs

Under a new memorandum, HUD & DHS leaders announced data-sharing and verification measures to prevent ineligible use of housing programs by undocumented immigrants, while critics warn the approach may deter mixed-status families from seeking assistance.

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The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, under Secretary Scott Turner, has partnered with the Department of Homeland Security to curb the use of taxpayer-funded housing programs by undocumented immigrants, as outlined in a memorandum of understanding signed this week.

The agreement, titled "American Housing Programs for American Citizens," establishes data-sharing protocols and deploys HUD staff to DHS's Incident Command Center to verify eligibility and prevent misuse of public housing resources. Officials cited data from the Center for Immigration Studies indicating that 59 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants access at least one welfare program, contributing to annual costs of about \$42 billion.

DHS Secretary Kristi Noem described the initiative as a reversal of prior policies that she said prioritized undocumented individuals over citizens, urging those in the country illegally to self-deport. Turner emphasized that American tax dollars should prioritize citizens amid the nation's housing crisis, committing to leverage technology and personnel for enforcement. The MOU affects approximately 9 million residents in public and subsidized housing, where eligibility checks have been inconsistent.

In a related move, Turner announced a new crime hotline during a visit to Memphis, allowing public housing residents to report suspected undocumented immigrants, criminals, sex offenders, human traffickers, and gang activity. The hotline, operated by HUD's Office of Inspector General, is available at 1-800-347-3735 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Central Time or online at hudoig.gov/hotline, with 24-hour monitoring. Turner encouraged residents to report observations, stating, "If you see it, if you hear about it, report it."

The actions reinforce Section 214 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1980, which bars federal housing assistance to undocumented immigrants, though mixed-status households may qualify if at least one member is eligible. HUD has directed Moving to Work public housing authorities to adhere strictly to these rules.

Critics, including immigrant advocacy groups, argue that such measures could deter eligible mixed-status families from seeking aid due to fear of separation or deportation, potentially exacerbating housing instability. No immediate timeline for full implementation was provided, but the partnership signals a broader administration push to align housing benefits with immigration enforcement. The initiative comes amid ongoing debates over federal housing policy, with some states already enacting local bans on assistance for undocumented individuals.