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February 3, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Vote NO on the Confirmation of Eric Scott Turner as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (“SPLC”), we write to formally express our opposition to the confirmation of Eric Scott Turner to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Our nation faces an unprecedented housing crisis—affordable housing is increasingly scarce, homelessness has surged to record levels, and housing discrimination complaints have reached an all-time high.¹ In this critical moment, Americans need a HUD Secretary with the expertise, vision, and commitment to addressing these challenges and investing in meaningful solutions. Mr. Turner’s experience, record, and testimony during his January 16th confirmation hearing made it clear he is not that person.

The SPLC was founded in Alabama in 1971 to make the promise of the Civil Rights Movement a reality for all. Fulfilling that promise requires rigorous enforcement of the Fair Housing Act—a product of that movement—and ensuring economic opportunities, such as housing and community development, are adequately supported and accessible to all. Studies demonstrate housing’s critical role in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and improving economic mobility.² Without affordable housing, families face limited opportunities to increase their earnings and achieve long-term stability. History also shows that federally sanctioned practices like redlining systematically excluded African Americans from access to homeownership, and racial inequities in housing still stubbornly persist today.³ That is why the SPLC works

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress,” December 2024, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>; National Fair Housing Alliance, “2023 Fair Housing Trends Report,” August 2023, <https://nationalfairhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023-Trends-Report-Final.pdf>

² Urban Institute, “Why Housing Matters for Upward Mobility,” January 2021, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103472/why-housing-matters-for-upward-mobility-evidence-and-indicators-for-practitioners-and-policymakers.pdf>

³ Leonard Egede, “The Modern Day Consequences of Historic Redlining,” *J Gen Intern Med*, February 2023, 38(6):1534–1537, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9901820/>



tirelessly—through litigation, advocacy, and public education—to advance policies that expand housing opportunities and combat discrimination in the housing market.

The HUD Secretary’s responsibilities are both expansive and consequential. The Secretary directs efforts to expand affordable housing, revitalize communities, and serve as a backstop against homelessness for millions of the nation’s poor, elderly, and disabled. With an annual discretionary budget of \$72 billion, the Secretary oversees more than 800,000 public housing units, provides rental assistance to 2 million families, combats housing discrimination and segregation, and supports the nation’s 650,000 homeless.⁴ Given the enormity of these duties, the SPLC sent you a letter on January 10, urging you to confirm qualified and capable leaders to fulfill the responsibilities of Cabinet-level positions and who serve the best interests of the American people.⁵ In our assessment, Mr. Turner falls far short of the standards we outlined. Mr. Turner is entirely lacking in the types of education and experience needed to lead HUD, or indeed any federal agency of such size, scope, and importance. Moreover, his past remarks and actions demonstrate that he is not committed to, and in many instances opposes, the critical work of HUD in supporting people in need and protecting their civil rights.

Mr. Turner Lacks the Skills, Experience, and Judgment to Lead HUD

If confirmed, Mr. Turner would lead one of the largest federal departments, overseeing nearly 100,000 employees. Such a role requests not only a bold and strategic vision but also the ability to execute that vision with sound judgment. Mr. Turner’s record does not suggest that he can do so.

Mr. Turner holds a degree in speech communications.⁶ While his post-college career has varied – from professional athlete⁷ to elected state legislator,⁸ from software company executive⁹ to apparel retailer,¹⁰ he has little background that would have prepared him to lead HUD. His recent two-year stint as a “chief visionary officer” for an apartment complex development firm¹¹ certainly has not provided him with the deep understanding of affordable housing, housing discrimination, poverty, and homelessness needed to carry out HUD’s mission. As executive director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council during President Trump’s first term, Mr. Turner reportedly oversaw the Opportunity Zones program—tax incentives

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “2024 Budget In Brief,” <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CFO/documents/2024-Budget-in-Brief-Final.pdf>

⁵ Letter from Margaret Huang and LaShawn Warren, January 10, 2025, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/policies/letter-to-senators-urging-careful-evaluation-of-president-elect-trumps-administrative-nominees/>

⁶ University of Illinois News-Gazette, *Scott Turner, President Trump’s nominee for HUD Secretary*, <https://uofi150.news-gazette.com/people/scott-turner>.

⁷ ESPN, *Scott Turner Profile*, accessed January 27, 2025, https://www.espn.com/nfl/player/bio/_id/878/scott-turner.

⁸ Juliann Ventura, *Trump taps NFL player Scott Turner as head of HUD*, The Hill, November 22, 2024, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/5005761-trump-taps-nfl-player-scott-turner-as-head-of-hud/>.

⁹ Aman Batheja, *In Bid for Speaker, Turner Looks to Beat the Odds*, Texas Tribune, December 17, 2014, <https://www.texastribune.org/2014/12/17/scott-turner-profile/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ JPI Announces Appointment of Scott Turner as Chief Visionary Officer, <https://www.jpi.com/jpi-announces-appointment-of-scott-turner-as-chief-visionary-officer/>.



designed to encourage private investment in undercapitalized, low-income communities.¹² However, despite claims by the President that the program Mr. Turner oversaw led to an “unprecedented effort that transformed our country’s most distressed communities,” the evidence paints a very different picture.¹³ Extensive studies indicate that Opportunity Zones primarily benefited wealthy investors while exploiting the very communities they were supposed to help.¹⁴ Such outcomes are diametrically opposed to the mission of HUD and raise serious questions about Mr. Turner’s values and judgment. He has yet to account for this record.

Like several of President Trump’s other nominees, Mr. Turner until recently held a position with America First Policy Institute, a right-wing think tank that was established in anticipation of a second Trump term.¹⁵ Despite lacking any background in education, he served as Chair of AFPI’s Center for Education Opportunity.¹⁶ AFPI’s troubling positions on issues related to the work of HUD are further reason for the Senate to reject Mr. Turner’s nomination. For example, AFPI has criticized the “Housing First” approach to homelessness, erroneously claiming¹⁷ that homelessness is primarily caused by mental illness and substance abuse.¹⁸ It has advocated for harmful policies such as “empowering law enforcement to act in defense of their communities and public spaces” and “deregulating local housing markets.” AFPI argued that the “rising number of mentally ill and substance-abusing individuals pose a danger to themselves and others” and that legislators should “ban street camping” and not allow “tent cities to proliferate in the name of ‘compassion.’”¹⁹ The highly complex problems of homelessness and housing shortages cannot be addressed through measures that criminalize the powerless and enrich the powerful, nor can they productively be tackled by a leader who fundamentally misunderstands them.

Questions about Mr. Turner’s fitness were only deepened by his failure to display good judgment during his confirmation hearing testimony. For example, when asked directly whether he

¹² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “Opportunity Zones,” <https://opportunityzones.hud.gov/>

¹³ Glenn Thrush, “Trump Picks Scott Turner, Little Known Official From First Term, to Lead HUD, November 22, 2024,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/22/us/politics/scott-turner-hud-trump.html>

¹⁴ Paul Solman, et al, “Trump-era Opportunity Zones Meant to Help Low-Income Communities Exploited By Investors,” November 11, 2021, *PBS News Hour*, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/trump-era-opportunity-zones-meant-to-help-low-income-communities-exploited-by-investors>; Center for American Progress, “New Research Adds to Evidence That Opportunity Zone Tax Breaks Are Costly and Ineffective,” June 16, 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/new-research-adds-to-evidence-that-opportunity-zone-tax-breaks-are-costly-and-ineffective/>

¹⁵ Michelle L. Price and Colleen Long, *What to Know About Pam Bondi, Trump’s New Pick for Attorney General*, Associated Press, Nov. 25, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/things-to-know-pam-bondiecd1d16075c7debda62223b475e3977d>.

¹⁶ America First Policy Institute, *America First Nomination: Scott Turner*, January 16, 2025, <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/america-first-nomination-scott-turner>.

¹⁷ America First Policy Institute, *America First Agenda, Pillar IX: Address Homelessness and Mental Health Issues*, <https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/safer-communities/address-homelessness-and-mental-health-issues-that-are-plaguing-our-streets>.

¹⁸ Francis Torres, Takeaways and Trends from the 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, Bipartisan Policy Center, December 20, 2023, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/takeaways-trends-2023-homeless-assessment-report/?gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAowcQInILyQqyiejOWirFGr8WJWVd&gclid=EAIAIQobChMIv6ra8cabiwMVpG5HAR0KUTrLEAAYASAAEgINPvD_BwE.

¹⁹ *America First Agenda, Pillar IX, supra*, note 16.



supported a 75 percent reduction in the federal workforce, he refused to provide a clear answer.²⁰ Mr. Turner is nominated to lead an agency whose mission demands a strong and dedicated workforce. Someone with good judgment would not hesitate to offer a straightforward response to such a critical issue.

Mr. Turner Lacks Commitment to Essential HUD Programs and Fully Enforcing Fair Housing Laws

Mr. Turner's record as an elected member of the Texas House of Representatives amply demonstrates that he lacks a commitment to civil rights and to the mission and programs that are at the heart of HUD's important work. During his time in office, Mr. Turner supported legislation to allow landlords to discriminate against people who receive federal housing assistance – assistance provided by the very agency he is now nominated to lead.²¹ He also voted against funding programs to support the homeless and simply to study homelessness.²² It is little wonder that some of the country's leading advocates on housing and homelessness have described Mr. Turner as “anti-poor” and expressed a belief that he will undermine the very purposes of HUD.²³

During his confirmation hearing on January 16th, Mr. Turner had the opportunity to outline his vision for HUD and respond to questions about his record. However, instead of providing clear, detailed answers, he avoided answering or signaled support for policies that could harm vulnerable communities and that are counterproductive to the aim of combatting homelessness and increasing access to housing free of discrimination. When repeatedly asked if he opposed proposed cuts to HUD, Mr. Turner failed to provide answers.²⁴ He also expressed openness to freezing federal housing and homelessness programs,²⁵ an approach that proved harmful during the first Trump administration, when proposed budget cuts threatened to displace over 200,000 households dependent on housing assistance.²⁶ Mr. Turner also advocated for greater involvement of private developers in the rental market, despite their history of raising rents, evicting tenants, and neglecting safe housing standards. He further endorsed new barriers to assistance, such as work requirements, which research shows disproportionately denies aid to those who need it most.²⁷

²⁰ Transcript of Senate Banking, Housing, Urban Affairs Committee Hearing on Nomination of Scott Turner to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, January 16, 2025, at 56.

²¹ Jesse Coburn and Andy Kroll, *Trump's Pick to Lead Federal Housing Agency Has Opposed Efforts to Aid the Poor*, Pro Publica, December 23, 2024, <https://www.propublica.org/article/scott-turner-hud-nominee-trump-public-housing-texas>.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Transcript of Senate Banking, Housing, Urban Affairs Committee Hearing on Nomination of Scott Turner to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, January 16, 2025, at 42, 51, 55, 60.

²⁵ *Id.* at 60,

²⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Trump Budget Deeply Cuts Health, Housing, Other Assistance for Low- and Moderate-Income Families*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/trump-budget-deeply-cuts-health-housing-other-assistance-for-low-and-moderate-income>

²⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Expanding Work Requirements Would Make it Harder for People to Meet Basic Needs,” March 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/expanding-work-requirements-would-make-it-harder-for-people-to-meet>



Mr. Turner's Values and Past Statements Run Counter to HUD's Mission of Supporting Americans in Need

HUD's mission remains to "create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all."²⁸ Implicit in that mission are both the necessity of and desire for government to play an active role in creating and expanding opportunities for the American people. Yet, throughout his career, Mr. Turner has made statements that directly contradict this fundamental principle.

Mr. Turner has repeatedly expressed views hostile to the very types of assistance HUD provides to low-income Americans. Mr. Turner has stated that government assistance is "one of the most destructive things for the family,"²⁹ and decried it as "perverse incentives created by the government and the welfare system, which in turn creates an epidemic of fatherlessness in our country."³⁰ When an interviewer claimed that receiving government assistance kept recipients in "bondage" *worse than slavery*, Mr. Turner replied, "That's right."³¹ While his words are concerning, his actions speak even louder. As a Texas state representative, Mr. Turner voted against efforts to expand affordable housing, fund programs to combat homelessness, and support foreclosure prevention programs. He also supported drug testing for poor families applying for government assistance.³² These views are not only in direct contradiction to HUD's mission and programming, but evidence a deep lack of understanding of the well-established evidence that poverty is perpetuated by the policy choices of our elected leaders, such as failures to maintain programs that have proven to decrease poverty,³³ to increase wages³⁴ and to remove barriers to education,³⁵ lack of adequate support for the development of skills and job training,³⁶ and more.

Conclusion

²⁸ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Mission," January 2025, <https://www.hud.gov/about/mission>

²⁹ Jesse Coburn, "Trump's Pick to Lead Federal Housing Agency Has Opposed Efforts to Aid the Poor," *ProPublica*, December 2024, <https://www.propublica.org/article/scott-turner-hud-nominee-trump-public-housing-texas>

³⁰ Prestonwood Baptist Church, Sermon by Scott Turner, https://www.youtube.com/live/5vIMlyYS_tQ?si=ASWvb3yp5uQAaBis.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ E.g., Kyle Ross, *Poverty Rose in 2022, But Policy Solutions Can Create a More Equitable Economy*, Center for American Progress, September 12, 2023, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/poverty-rose-in-2022-but-policy-solutions-can-create-a-more-equitable-economy/>; Danilo Trisi, *Expiration of Pandemic Relief Led to Record Increases in Poverty and Child Poverty in 2022*, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, June 10, 2024, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/expiration-of-pandemic-relief-led-to-record-increases-in-poverty>.

³⁴ Kyle Ross, *The Minimum Wage is a Poverty Wage*, Center for American Progress, July 24, 2024, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-minimum-wage-is-a-poverty-wage/>.

³⁵ Noble Nonprofit, *The Role of Education in Breaking the Cycle of Poverty*, <https://www.noblenonprofit.org/education-in-breaking-the-cycle-of-poverty/>.

³⁶ Tazra Mitchell, *Promising Policies Could Reduce Economic Hardship, Expand Opportunity for Struggling Workers*, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, September 7, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/promising-policies-could-reduce-economic-hardship-expand-opportunity-for-struggling-workers>.



In our January 10, 2025, letter, we emphasized that the framers of the Constitution entrusted the Senate with the power of Advice and Consent to ensure the public's interest is served and that only the most qualified individuals are entrusted with leadership roles.³⁷ Based on Mr. Turner's judgment, record, and values, he does not meet the high standard necessary to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Our country is facing an unprecedented housing crisis³⁸ that threatens the stability and well-being of millions of Americans. Now more than ever, HUD needs experienced, steady leadership to effectively address these pressing challenges, expand access to affordable housing, and reduce homelessness. Mr. Turner's record not only fails to demonstrate the qualifications required for this role, but his policies and views suggest he would exacerbate the crisis, harming those most in need.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to vote "NO" on his confirmation as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'LaShawn G. Warren'.

LaShawn Warren
Chief Policy Officer

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Sakira Cook'.

Sakira Cook
Federal Policy Director

³⁷ Letter from Margaret Huang and LaShawn Warren, January 10, 2025, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/policies/letter-to-senators-urging-careful-evaluation-of-president-elect-trumps-administrative-nominees/>

³⁸ Ronda Kaysen, *Can the U.S. Climb Out of Its 'Unprecedented' Housing Crisis?*, The New York Times, December 11, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/11/realestate/housing-market-2024-2025.html>.