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August 12, 2016

Honorable Julián Castro, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 Seventh Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20141

Dear Secretary Castro,

We are a group of academic researchers, leading the Creating Moves to Opportunity (CMTO) project, a collaborative partnership with 17 PHAs, dedicated to developing and evaluating means to facilitate long-lasting moves to opportunity neighborhoods through the Housing Choice Voucher program.

We write now in support of the letter submitted by the Boston (BHA) and Cambridge (CHA) Massachusetts Housing Authorities on July 13, petitioning to enter for Regional Moving to Work (MTW) designation for those agencies through CHA's existing MTW participation.

The CMTO project first began to materialize as a result of CHA Executive Director Gregory Russ approaching Raj Chetty to discuss the policy implications of the long-term analysis of the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment by Chetty, Hendren, and Katz (2016). These initial conversations led to a conference in December 2015 with researchers, PHAs, and others, including staff from HUD and a number of private foundations. Since December, 17 PHAs – including CHA – have signed a letter of intent to indicate commitment to the effort.

We are eager to partner with PHAs to introduce and rigorously evaluate, through randomized evaluations, programs that promote housing choice and create persistent moves to opportunity, particularly for families with younger children. Through CMTO, we are currently in discussions with the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities, and with private foundations, about the possibility of a regional study to understand the effects of programs to increase mobility and opportunity moves. Introducing these efforts is only possible because of the program flexibility afforded by the PHAs' MTW participation. CHA has been a crucial thought leader in the CMTO project thus far and has expressed an interest in partnering with BHA to explore similar regional mobility efforts and evaluation in the Boston/Cambridge area.

Boston and Cambridge are two cities with strong geographic and economic ties, but contrasts in opportunity and achievement. As highlighted in the letter submitted by BHA and CHA, MTW regional designation has the potential to expand geographic housing choice and allow for exploration of housing counseling, incentives, and other services to support opportunity moves. Given their proximity, Cambridge and Boston could provide valuable insight into the value of efforts to support opportunity moves and into the motivation of participating families and landlords. MTW regionalization opens the door to providing support for both CHA voucher

holders that increasingly are moving into Boston due to difficult market conditions in Cambridge, and for BHA voucher holders who may consider options that previously were not apparent to them.

Massachusetts ranks among the worst states in the United States with respect to income inequality. Recent research has provided new evidence that growing up in a high-poverty neighborhood has a negative effect on a number of important life outcomes, including earnings, and that helping families move to lower-poverty neighborhoods improves long-term outcomes for children. From the letter, BHA and CHA “believe that by properly structuring programs that promote housing choice, we can target initiatives which mitigate some of the ‘root causes’ of income inequality that plague the region.” We are dedicated to working with partners like BHA and CHA to develop evidence-based strategies to improve housing choice, create moves to opportunity, and promote upward economic mobility. Your approval to allow CHA and BHA to obtain a regional MTW designation would go a long way not only to facilitate important research, but also to dramatically improve the lives of low-income families with dreams of moving to opportunity.

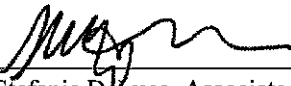
Sincerely,



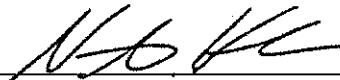
Peter Bergman, Assistant Professor of Economics and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University



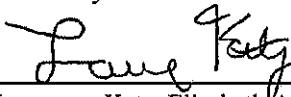
Raj Chetty, Professor of Economics, Stanford University



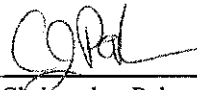
Stefanie DeLuca, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University



Nathaniel Hendren, Assistant Professor of Economics, Harvard University



Lawrence Katz, Elisabeth Allison Professor of Economics, Harvard University



Christopher Palmer, Assistant Professor of Real Estate and Urban Economics, Haas School of Business, University of California at Berkeley

CC: Rep. Michael Capuano, 7th Congressional District of MA  
William McGonagle, Administrator, Boston Housing Authority  
Katherine M. O'Regan and Todd Richardson, PD&R  
Lourdes Castro Ramirez, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, HUD  
Gregory Russ, Executive Director, Cambridge Housing Authority  
Senator Elizabeth Warren, US Senator