



Rep. Tom Emmer on House Committee Hearing

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****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Really appreciate you holding this important hearing today. And thank you, Secretary Fudge, for joining us as we conduct oversight of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Young Americans are experiencing a mental health crisis greater than we've ever seen in the history of this country. Madam Secretary, under your leadership, is it a priority of HUD to implement policies that expand access to mental health services across the country?

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** Is it our what? Is it one of your priorities to implement policies that would expand access to mental health care? No, but we do. I mean, what we do is we provide resources for housing for the disabled, which includes mental illness.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** All right. Well, great. That was where I was going. That's a priority of mine as well. And Madam Secretary, briefly, what has HUD under your leadership done to accomplish this priority?

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** Well, one of the things we've done, even in this last budget, is to put more resources into our programs to build housing for the disabled. Because what we have found is just like with senior housing, we don't have enough of it, and we certainly don't have enough housing for the disabled.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** One of the things that you are doing is HUD is training housing counselors in basic mental health skills. And I'm pleased to say that HUD is raising mental health awareness through a new educational campaign on housing discrimination faced by people with mental health issues, which plays into what you were talking about, which is great. Do you think there's more that HUD can be doing?

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** Well, I don't know that there is, but I'm certainly open to suggestion because it is a major problem in this country. Not only just mental health in the terms that most of us think about it, but large numbers of people who sleep on our streets have mental illness as well.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** Madam Secretary, are you familiar with the Securing Facilities for Mental Health Services Act? It's a bipartisan bill that I've been working on with Congressman Richie Torres the past several years.

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**



** I am not.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** As you know, Section 242 of the National Housing Act currently restricts psychiatric inpatient hospitals from applying for mortgage assistance through HUD. This contributes to a shortage of beds for patients seeking mental health treatment, and due to the mental health crisis we face, those in need are not receiving the mental health care they need. Madam Secretary, do you support efforts to allow psychiatric inpatient hospitals to receive mortgage assistance through your agency?

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** Certainly. I mean, I think that we need to do a lot more. I mean, part of the problem with beds now is the Medicare formula, which back in the day, 50, 60 years ago, decided that we would not allow more beds for mental illness because they, quote-unquote, did not want to house the mentally ill. So there are a number of issues that I think we need to address, but I'm all for it.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** Fantastic, and that's great to hear because the Securities Facilities for Mental Health Services Act does exactly that, so I look forward to working with you. Unfortunately, last Congress, your staff, and I don't know that you know this, told the Democrat leadership on this committee that the bill would be difficult for HUD to implement, and we should forego marking this bill up and conduct a study on it instead. Secretary Fudge, with respect, it simply doesn't make sense, and again, this is staff, this was not you, so I don't expect that you're personally aware of it, but it simply doesn't make sense to compromise helping people who have high-risk medical needs because of the red tape involved in making the change, and I take it from our discussion today that you would agree with that.

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** I'm not aware of it, and I'll check to find out what that is.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** Great, I have correspondence if it would be helpful. We asked the Government Accountability Office, or the GAO, to study the potential pros and cons of such a change, and it observed that there were no structural obstacles to have the Federal Housing Administration insure psychiatric inpatient hospitals. The forthcoming GAO report due in the next few weeks also outlines some practices to consider incorporating to reduce any new risks. In a good faith effort to work with your agency and produce effective legislation, I'd like to give you a chance to describe to this committee the challenges that you think HUD might face, and if there are none that come to mind, we can certainly continue this discussion, but that HUD might, that maybe your staff was referring to, that HUD might face as obstacles to implementing something like this.

****SECRETARY FUDGE:**

** The only major problems we have is, of course, when you have populations that have emotional or mental issues, you need the proper kinds of staff and the proper kinds of people who are trained to do the work. That would be the only impediment that I could see, but it's the same problem we're having now with assisted living facilities, etc. We need a trained workforce to do the work.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**



** Wow. Thank you, Secretary Fudge. I look forward to working with you and your department on making an important change here, and I yield back.

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