

**DUTCHTOWN SOUTH**

COMMUNITY CORPORATION

July 25, 2023

Federal Housing Finance Agency
Office of Multifamily Analytics and Policy
400 7th Street SW, 9th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20219

Subject: Comment on Tenant Protections For Enterprise-Backed Multifamily Properties

DutchTown South Community Corporation is a community development corporation that serves the Dutchtown, Marine Villa, Gravois Park, and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods of the City of St. Louis. We work with residents to create equitable and fully resourced neighborhoods in addition to owning and managing several affordable housing units. Because we both provide housing and work with residents to advocate for affordable housing, residents frequently call and share their housing concerns. The two primary concerns that residents share are unaffordable rent increases and prohibitive tenant screenings.

- **Limit rent increases:** We ask that the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) limit rent increases in multifamily properties backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to 1.5 times the Consumer Price Index or 3%, whichever is lower. This amount is in line with what we charge in rent increases at DutchTown South Community Corporation. It is a relatively affordable and predictable rent increase that will keep people in their homes while allowing for the maintenance of clean and safe units.
- **Protect tenants from unfair tenant screenings:**
 - We also frequently hear from residents about concerns with finding housing if they have a criminal record or a poor credit history, including past evictions.
 - FHFA should require landlords to provide tenants with the criteria that is used to evaluate their application and a written reason if their application is rejected. Landlords should be prohibited from denying applications based solely on the applicant's credit or eviction history.
 - FHFA should also limit the lookback period for credit and criminal history to three years. Circumstances that occurred prior to three years before the rental application are unlikely to reflect the tenants current circumstances.
 - Finally, FHFA should prohibit landlords from denying tenants based on their arrest record alone. Similarly, FHFA should identify convictions that

would not have an impact on the success of the tenant and prohibit landlords from discriminating on that basis.

- Residents of the City of St. Louis are fortunate that discrimination based on source of income is prohibited in tenant screenings. These protections should be extended to all tenants in multifamily properties backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

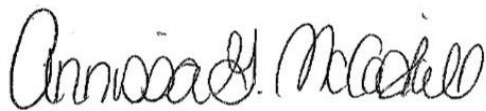
In addition to what we hear from residents of the neighborhoods we serve, Dutchtown South Community Corporation is in coalition with other organizations in St. Louis that are advocating for tenants' right to counsel and quality housing standards.

- **Tenant right to counsel:** We believe that all tenants of FHFA-backed housing should have the right to counsel. In municipalities that have implemented tenants' right to counsel programs, tenants with legal representation have a much lower chance of being evicted or forced out of their homes. The City of St. Louis enacted a right to counsel program for renters in July 2023 after sustained advocacy from tenants' rights organizations in the city. Tenants' right to counsel will reduce displacement and maintain stable neighborhoods.
- **Quality housing standards and enforcement:** FHFA should also set minimum housing quality standards that are protective of tenant health and safety. In order to ensure these housing quality standards are met, FHFA should work with city inspection agencies to ensure that FHFA-backed multifamily properties are regularly inspected.

The regulations listed are vital to ensuring that tenants have access to safe and affordable housing. FHFA must follow these regulations with strong enforcement. If these regulations are not followed by FHFA-backed housing, landlords should be found to be in technical default and should be disqualified from accessing FHFA-backed loans.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on multifamily tenant protections.

Sincerely,



Annissa G. McCaskill
Executive Director