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A house is seen for sale in Miami in this 2009 photo. (CNS/Reuters/Carlos Barria)

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The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA said the Trump administration should withdraw its proposed rule to replace the Obama administration's 2015 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing regulation because the new rule "undermines efforts to promote fair housing and human dignity."

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson announced July 23 his agency is replacing the Obama-era regulation with a new fair housing rule called "Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice." It is to take effect in 30 days.

"Fair housing regulations remain one of the key tools for addressing long-standing inequities and historical disadvantages and must be strengthened, not weakened," said a July 28 joint statement from two Catholic bishops and the head of Catholic Charities USA.

"As the U.S. bishops wrote 45 years ago in 'The Right to a Decent Home' [pastoral message], 'an absence of racial discrimination is no longer enough. We must insist upon effective programs to remedy past injustice,'" the statement said. "Let us renew this call to action to ensure all people have access to safe, decent and affordable housing."

The statement was issued by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the the bishops' conference's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, chairman of the conference's Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism; and Dominican Sr. Donna Markham, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA.

"HUD's replacement of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule undermines efforts to promote fair housing and human dignity," the Catholic leaders said. " Discriminatory practices such as redlining, disinvestment from communities, discriminatory practices in selling or renting homes, and racial and economic segregation have undermined fair housing for generations and continue to harm communities of color today."

HUD's new rule announced by Carson "minimizes the affirmative responsibility to promote fair housing by removing clear guidance and effective accountability," they added.

The 1968 federal Fair Housing Act signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson included the provision Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, which requires the HUD secretary to administer all HUD programs "in a manner that affirmatively furthers fair housing."

In July 2015, Julian Castro, HUD secretary under President Barack Obama, promulgated a new rule to address what the administration considered "unmet goals" laid out in the 1968 law's fair housing provision in order to actively promote racial integration in cities and suburbs.

The rule required municipalities receiving federal money for any purpose related to housing or urban development to look into whether barriers to fair housing existed in their communities and if so, to create a plan to rectify them.

Carson, in announcing the new rule he issued, said the 2015 rule "proved to be complicated, costly and ineffective." He said it forced communities "to comply with complicated regulations that require hundreds of pages of reporting."

"After reviewing thousands of comments on the proposed changes to the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) regulation, we found it to be unworkable and ultimately a waste of time for localities to comply with, too often resulting in funds being steered away from communities that need them most," Carson said in a statement.

"Instead, the Trump administration has established programs like Opportunity Zones that are driving billions of dollars of capital into underserved communities where affordable housing exists, but opportunity does not," Carson said, adding that local communities work with partners in these zones "to revitalize their communities so upward mobility, improved housing, and home ownership is within reach for more people."

He added, "Washington has no business dictating what is best to meet your local community's unique needs."

HUD first published the proposed new rule in the Federal Register on Jan. 14 of this year, which opened a period of public comment with a cutoff date of March 16.

The bishops' conference and Catholic Charities USA filed a joint comment March 13 urging the Trump administration to withdraw the proposed rule and fully implement

the 2015 AFFH regulation. The comment was signed by Anthony Picarello, associate general secretary and general counsel at the U.S. bishops' conference, and Brian Corbin, Catholic Charities executive vice president for member services.

"Addressing housing segregation must remain a high priority for HUD. Housing segregation has a series of cascading effects that lead toward generational poverty," Picarello and Corbin wrote. " Where one lives dictates the access to quality education, food, health care, clean water and air, and transportation.

"There is no denying that the United States has a history of discriminatory housing practices and public policies," which led to passage of the Fair Housing Act, they noted.

Fair housing regulations "remain one of the key tools" for addressing inequities, they said, adding that "we know that housing discrimination persists, some still overt and much more in covert ways even in the face of current fair housing rules and regulations."

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