

Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

United States Senate

Testimony of Katherine M. O'Regan for the confirmation hearing

September 10, 2013

Chairman Johnson, Senator Crapo and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as you consider my nomination as the Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Policy Development and Research. I would like to start by acknowledging and thanking family members and friends here today, both physically and virtually. In addition to those watching from a distance, my brother Bill O'Regan and his oldest child, Bill, are seated behind me. And watching with several sisters from her home in Rhode Island, I want to specifically acknowledge my mother, Mary O'Regan, whose own career so greatly shaped my path to this hearing. Through her work in public health, and my father's work in education, I was taught the tremendous importance of public service.

My mother is a nurse who spent most of her professional career running a community health clinic located within a HUD-funded public housing project in Providence. I spent formative years witnessing the importance of place – how neighborhoods and communities matter in the lives of families – and how very important well-designed public policies and well-run community institutions can be.

My career has focused on such communities, institutions and policies. Let me briefly highlight three aspects of my background most relevant for this position that also shed light on how I see the office's role.

First, my training and research are well aligned with HUD broadly and this office specifically. For more than twenty years, I have taught and conducted research on a range of issues related to housing policy, urban areas, and community development. This includes work focused on how and why neighborhoods and communities change, what policies might drive economic improvements, and research evaluating the various effects of housing policies. As an economist who

does quantitative work, I understand the role of the economic affairs division, and use the data it collects and maintains. As a researcher whose own work speaks directly to policy, I appreciate the critical contribution of this department in driving sound data-based policy decisions. Part of the department's charge is to link to the broader research community, of which I am a long-standing member.

Second, the office of Policy Development and Research has a much broader and more important set of constituents, namely the wide array of federal, state and local actors in the housing and community development fields. I have been actively engaged with members of these groups far beyond my research, from advising and collaborating with city and state agencies, to formal and informal work with community development and based organizations. These experiences provide me with a much greater understanding of their needs, and how HUD may better serve them.

Finally, I have extensive administrative and managerial experience. Over my career, I have undertaken a range of leadership roles, including more than a decade leading the largest Masters program at NYU's Wagner School of Public Service. My most significant managerial role was as Associate Dean of Faculty, during a time of momentous change at the school and the university. This position required working collaboratively within the school, across the university, and externally with key stakeholders. I chose to do this work because having well-run institutions matters, and having managed has improved how I think about the design of effective policies.

I believe in HUD's mission of creating and supporting cohesive and economically healthy communities. Doing so requires the data and knowledge to make sound, evidence-based choices about using our limited resources well, and this is the department's main role: to create such knowledge, and to participate in policy decisions that make good use of evidence. Secretary Donovan has emphasized this approach in his tenure, even highlighting its importance to the continued transformation of HUD itself. If confirmed, I look forward to working tirelessly on this goal, with the Secretary, Administration and members of this Committee.

I would be honored to serve. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.