

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 2, 2013

Honorable Shaun Donovan
Secretary of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Donovan,

We write to express our concern about the recent suppression of private religious speech at a Minnesota senior living complex that is subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In October, a resident at a nonprofit independent living apartment complex in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota was prohibited from reading her Bible, praying, and engaging in conversations about her faith. Ruth Sweats reported that while she was having a private conversation in the commons area at the Osborne Apartments, the facility's social worker interrupted, advising her that such religious discussion was not permitted because the complex is subsidized by HUD. When Mrs. Sweats explained that her discussion was protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution, the social worker said that because the complex is a HUD facility, she did not have such constitutional rights.

As Members of Congress dedicated to protecting religious freedom in America, we are troubled that recipients of HUD funds think they are required to censor individuals' private religious speech. Neither the Constitution nor the receipt of federal funds requires such suppression. Thankfully, Mrs. Sweats' situation was rectified after she notified legal counsel of the incident. However, we are concerned that confusion by other recipients of HUD funds could lead to similar circumstances.

In light of this unfortunate incident, we urge you to issue a policy statement clarifying that recipients of HUD funding are not required to prohibit or in any way inhibit the religious expression of residents at facilities subsidized by HUD. We look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter.

Sincerely,


J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress


ROBERT ADERHOLT
Member of Congress

Walter B Jones

WALTER JONES
Member of Congress

Tim Huelskamp

TIM HUELSKAMP
Member of Congress

Alan Nunnelee

ALAN NUNNELEE
Member of Congress

Stevan Pearce

STEVAN PEARCE
Member of Congress

Vicky Hartzler

VICKY HARTZLER
Member of Congress

Michele Bachmann

MICHELE BACHMANN
Member of Congress

Lee Terry

LEE TERRY
Member of Congress

Jim Jordan

JIM JORDAN
Member of Congress

Jeff Miller

JEFF MILLER
Member of Congress

John Kline

JOHN KLINE
Member of Congress

Steven Palazzo

STEVEN PALAZZO
Member of Congress

Phil Gingrey

PHIL GINGREY
Member of Congress

Robert Wittman

ROBERT WITTMAN
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson

JOE WILSON
Member of Congress