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April 20, 2016

The Honorable Julián Castro  
Secretary of Housing and Urban Development  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street S.W.  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Castro:

I write to urge the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to take meaningful action to protect families who live in federal low-income housing from the hidden danger involving window covering cords. Nearly every month for the past two decades, a child has died from strangulation by an accessible window covering cord. An accessible window covering cord includes any operational, pull or internal cord that a child could wrap around their neck. These incidents, which occur when an infant or toddler becomes entangled in a hazardous loop from a window covering with an accessible cord, happen in a matter of seconds and silently—victims are unable to cry out for help.

Families seeking federal housing assistance are particularly vulnerable to this hazard. Nearly *half* of all children less than six years of age—the age that most strangulation deaths occur—live in low-income families.<sup>1</sup> Children with single mothers also represent a disproportionate share of children in low-income families (42 percent).<sup>2</sup> The lack of an additional caregiver's support, along with the unpredictable work schedule common for low-income earners, exacerbate the challenges of childcare, and can make it difficult for low-income single parents to ensure the constant supervision necessary wherever there is a window covering with an accessible cord. Although some parents and caregivers have used cleats, tie down devices and other "safety devices" to attempt to minimize the strangulation risk posed by accessible cords, they have found that a child can still gain access to cords in cleats, or that the device can break, exposing a child to the hazard. These devices do not render cords inaccessible.

In addition, since the need for federally assisted housing far outstrips the supply,<sup>3</sup> households that are fortunate enough to receive assistance generally must accept whatever housing is available, along with the window coverings that come with it. Low-income households not only lack resources to remediate this safety hazard, but are likely to be fined if

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 24 million children under six years of age in the United States, 48% live in low-income families.  
[http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_1097.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1097.html).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.prb.org/pdf10/single-motherfamilies.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Only 1 in 4 households eligible for housing assistance from HUD programs are actually assisted.  
<http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/HousingSpotlight2-2.pdf>.

they do so, as tenants are generally required to sign contracts that prohibit the alteration or replacement of window coverings.

Fortunately, strangulation deaths and injuries by window covering cords are entirely preventable and HUD already has the statutory and regulatory authority needed to eliminate this fatal safety hazard in federally assisted housing. Pursuant to 24 CFR 5.703, which governs physical condition standards for HUD housing, windows in dwelling units “must be free of health and safety hazards.”<sup>4</sup>

Considering that HUD already recognizes window-covering cords as a major home hazard in its Healthy Homes Program Guidance Manual<sup>5</sup>, I urge you to strictly enforce HUD regulations and apply them to window coverings with accessible cords. In January 2015, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), recognizing that the voluntary standard is inadequate, initiated an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking that could result in a mandatory rule to address the hazards posed by corded window coverings.<sup>6</sup> However, it would still take several years for a new mandatory safety standard for window coverings to go into effect, and because it would only apply to newly manufactured products, the safety standard will do nothing to remove this dangerous product from existing homes.

Thus, I urge HUD to require federally assisted housing renovations to prioritize the installment of child-safe window coverings in households with young children. I also urge HUD to act to ensure that households are not prohibited from or fined for replacing their window coverings with child-safe alternatives.

I would also like to bring to your attention that thanks to commitments by lower cost retailers like IKEA, Target, and Wal-Mart to no longer sell window coverings with accessible cords, replacing dangerous window coverings can be done economically. I encourage you to explore whether there are economies of scale that HUD could help facilitate in order to expedite the replacing of old, dangerous window coverings.

Finally, I respectfully request you also report back the following information:

1. A spreadsheet of all federally assisted housing and whether or not window coverings installed in each community is safe for young children (contains no accessible cords).
  - a. For federally assisted housing with window coverings with accessible cords, whether tenants are allowed to replace window coverings without penalty.
2. Any action HUD has taken to require landlords to replace dangerous window coverings in federally assisted housing.

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<sup>4</sup> 24 CFR 5.703 (d).

<sup>5</sup> [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=hhpqm\\_final\\_ch1.pdf](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=hhpqm_final_ch1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Corded Window Coverings; Request for Comments and Information, 80 Fed. Reg. 2327 (proposed Jan. 16, 2015); <http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Regulations-Laws--Standards/Rulemaking/Final-and-Proposed-Rules/Corded-Window-Coverings/>.

3. Any education and outreach HUD has conducted to make sure residents in federally assisted housing are aware of the risks of window coverings with accessible cords.

I look forward to hearing your response and working with you to eliminate this dangerous yet preventable safety hazard.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate