

May 4, 2020

Hon. Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Hon. Mark A. Calabria
Director
Federal Housing Finance Agency
400 7th St, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Hon. Benjamin S. Carson
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th St, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Hon. Kathy L. Kraninger
Director
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
1700 G St, NW
Washington, DC 20552

Dear Sirs/Madam:

The undersigned consumer advocacy, civil rights and mortgage and housing industry groups join together in urging you to work to create a single consumer-facing portal to provide information to consumers on mortgage and rental relief options available under the CARES Act and subsequent legislative and administrative actions in effect during the National Emergency.

Consumers are under immense personal and financial pressures as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues. While there are several sources of information available from the federal government about federal mortgage and rent relief options, there is no consolidated site that incorporates all options and directions consumers should follow. A single point of entry for consumers specifically focused on housing, integrated into the www.coronavirus.gov platform and prominently displayed on the landing page, could serve as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of up-to-date and accurate information for renters and homeowners. It could be easily expanded as new information becomes available and could centralize consumer contact, either directly or indirectly through trusted independent organizations, like HUD-approved housing counseling agencies, that consumers will call upon for guidance. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has already developed and posted useful information with links to resources for consumers, providing a solid foundation for the creation of the type of single site that we are recommending.

A lesson of the 2008 financial crisis was the benefit of directing consumers to assistance using consolidated tools, including a single .gov website, a consumer assistance hotline, print, electronic and other advertising. While it may not be possible to replicate all of these efforts, the federal government should provide a clear and prominent access point for consumers during this crisis, which almost certainly will affect millions more households than did the 2008 crisis.

Such a site should be accessible to people with disabilities in accordance with Section 508 Standards as per the US Access Board; feature a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) written in simple, accessible English suitable to the widest range of education and literacy; incorporate links and references to HUD-approved housing counseling services and Qualified Fair Housing Organizations that can help consumers; links to mortgage servicers' websites that can address specific concerns for consumers whose loans they service; links to individual agency websites that may provide additional information;

links to resources for consumers facing discriminatory barriers; and provide this information in languages in addition to English to accommodate the many households with limited English proficiency.

Congress has provided significant relief through the CARES Act and evidence is growing that mortgaged homeowners and renters alike are facing growing difficulties meeting their housing obligations because of the National Emergency. Quickly acting to provide this proposed single point of access for concerned consumers would be a very helpful contribution to easing consumer concerns and expedite delivery of the relief.

Respectfully,

Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund
Center for Community Progress
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Responsible Lending
Community Home Lenders Association
Consumer Action
Consumer Federation of America
Homeownership Preservation Foundation
HOPE NOW
Housing Finance Strategies LLC
Housing Policy Council
Independent Community Bankers of America
Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Mortgage Bankers Association
NAACP
National Action Network
National Association of Consumer Advocates
National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals
National Association of Realtors®
National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC)
National Community Stabilization Trust
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Council of State Housing Agencies
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Housing Conference
National Housing Law Project
National Housing Resource Center
Northwest Side Housing Center
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
Prosperity Now
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
UnidosUS
US Mortgage Insurers