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EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY, AND
SECONDARY EDUCATION



RICK W. ALLEN
12TH DISTRICT, GEORGIA

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410
RE: REMS Property ID #800004632

Dear Secretary Fudge:

I write to convey my urgent concerns with the building and living conditions in the Bon Air Apartments on Walton Way in Augusta, Georgia. Since 1924, the Bon Air has stood as a historic landmark located in the Summerhill neighborhood of Augusta.¹ In recent decades, the Bon Air converted over 200 rental units for those utilizing the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance. However, unlike the promise of safe and affordable housing that typically comes with housing assistance, the conditions and management of the Bon Air have consistently failed to deliver a clean and welcoming environment for its residents and the surrounding neighborhood.

As you know, for years, there have been ongoing issues with the management of the Bon Air apartments. Because the apartments are Project-Based Rental Assistance, HUD, and not the local housing authority, is fully responsible for administering federal housing assistance to these units. In 2016, HUD Atlanta staff did an inspection at the request of residents and the community and found elderly and disabled residents sitting in 90-degree apartments because of broken air conditioning in the Georgia summer heat.² Yet, even after this visit there was no concerted effort to hold management accountable and responsible for making substantial improvements. In fact, the Bon Air's HUD inspection scores have barely passed the minimum year after year, until 2019.³

In late 2020, Redwood Housing Partners bought the Bon Air. Unfortunately, the living conditions have not changed and reports show that Redwood does not have a successful track record of managing low-income housing in its many other properties across the United States.⁴ Tenants suffer from growing mold, infestation of roaches, rats, stained carpets, the smell of urine in the stairways and a lack of security and unsecured doors that allow unwanted visitors to access the property. The fire department was called over 200 times in 2021 and the latest information

¹<https://www.historicaugusta.org/properties/bonair-hotel-2101-walton-way/>

²<https://www.wrdw.com/content/news/OYS-No-Air-in-Bon-Air-If-HUD-investigates-after-OYS-investigates-385094331.html>

³https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/mfh/remis/remisinspscores/remspshysinspscores

⁴<https://www.augustachronicle.com/story/news/2022/02/02/what-do-new-owners-bon-air-richmond-summit-have-planned/9253701002/>

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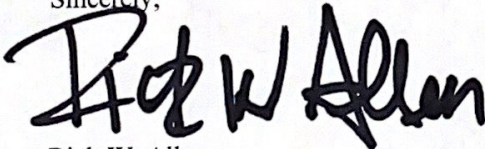
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cited over 150 police reports filed within a mile of the apartments.⁵ Those in need of subsidized housing should not have to put their incomes towards unlivable apartments, just as much as taxpayers should not be funneling rent subsidies into a building that fails to provide a safe roof over the heads of its tenants.

In December 2021, the owners provided an update on what investments they intended to make to the apartments, but extensive repairs and renovations seem to be years away. This disregard of building maintenance is truly unacceptable. Most recently, on March 16, 2022, the Richmond County Fire Department conducted an inspection and even with limited access to the building, the fire department found 19 code violations, citing missing and damaged ceiling tiles, combustible materials in electrical rooms, and issues with the fire alarm system.⁶

No individual should have to live in these conditions. The community of Augusta, investigative reporters and local public servants are all to thank for their diligence in uncovering many of the unconscionable issues at the Bon Air apartments. I respectfully request that HUD make available to my office any documents Redwood Housing Partners has provided the Department regarding the owners' plans for renovation and investment in the Bon Air apartment. I also request that HUD immediately begin an investigation into the unlivable conditions at Bon Air apartments and meet with my office, community leaders, and the local housing authority to work toward an expedited resolution to this issue. A housing issue of this magnitude will have no easy answers, but the residents living in Bon Air have waited far too long for owners and management to step up and make a real change. It's time that all partners involved in providing safe and affordable housing take action to address this matter. Thank you for your attention to this critical housing issue. I respectfully request a response by May 4, 2022.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick W. Allen". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rick W. Allen
Member of Congress

⁵ <https://www.wrdw.com/2022/03/22/whats-status-promised-changes-bon-air-apartments/>

⁶ <https://www.wfxg.com/story/46079286/investigating-history-bon-air-apartments-disrepair-and-future-outlook>