

Comments to the
House of Representatives
Subcommittee
On
Housing and Community Opportunity
Committee on Financial Services

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Mount Vernon Nazarene University
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The Honorable Chairman Robert Ney and committee members,

Greetings from Mount Vernon Nazarene University. I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you this afternoon.

Mount Vernon Nazarene University is located on a beautiful 400-acre campus in Mount Vernon, Ohio, a city of 15,000 people located approximately 50 miles northeast of Columbus. Mount Vernon serves as the county seat of Knox County, whose median household income is \$29,801.

With the help of community leaders, our University was founded in 1968. These community leaders saw the potential for a partnership that could be built between the city and an educational community with a faith-based focus; a relationship that would assist both bodies in learning and service. Mount Vernon Nazarene University is a regional teaching university -- one of the eight liberal arts higher education institutions supported by the Church of the Nazarene here in the United States. The International Church of the Nazarene, a protestant denomination with Methodist roots, sponsors fifty-seven educational institutions worldwide. Mount Vernon Nazarene University has grown from 191 students in the fall of 1968 to over 2300 students enrolled today. We have expanded our academic offerings beyond the traditional undergraduate residency program to include non-traditional undergraduate and graduate programs offered at five sites in central Ohio. We are thrilled with our enrollment with students from Ohio, West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky. We are encouraged with enrollment growth; we are ecstatic regarding our academic reputation for graduating outstanding students in teacher education, business and pre-medicine programs.

We are intentional and passionate in our efforts to educate and train students to serve others, a mission since our founding days. The motto of Mount Vernon Nazarene University is 'to seek to learn, is to seek to serve'. We specifically educate students in a faith-based Christian environment to be successful business leaders, educators, social workers, healthcare professionals and ministers who embrace their chosen vocation with a servant's heart.

Living on or near our campus is essential to the learning experience of an academic community of faith. At present we do not have adequate funds to build single parent or married student housing on campus. Since many of our students come from the Appalachian region of Ohio, West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, and are first generation college students, they simply cannot afford the typical rental facilities off campus. Additionally, adequate quality housing for low-income families is not available in our community. As I understand the current HUD regulations, we are ineligible for any federal assistance due to the faith-based nature of our institution.

I seek to model servant leadership to an outstanding campus community committed to making our local community and country a better place to live and work. I applaud and support the efforts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development to remove rules against discrimination in employment practices in their programs. I also support the elimination of the general requirement that services be provided in the absence of religious influence.

To answer your specific questions today:

Does the proposed HUD rule assist faith-based organizations in providing housing and needed services to low-income families?

The proposed regulations, if enacted, would provide significant assistance. However, further clarification is needed when a combination of federal AND state funds are requested. Furthermore, I recommend a clearer definition be added for faith-based higher educational institutions such as Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

Do faith-based programs reach people who are not currently receiving government funded housing services?

Yes, but the partnership between the federal government and faith-based institutions like Mount Vernon Nazarene University could be substantially strengthened. In our situation, the lack of affordable housing leads some students to choose a college or university without the definitive and critical link between service and learning.

How can faith-based programs more effectively assist low-income families become self-sufficient?

We believe in our process and product. Students graduate from Mount Vernon Nazarene University, and other faith-based institutions like ours, prepared and equipped for life-long service to others. Approving the proposed HUD rule would enable faith-based higher education institutions to serve more low-income individuals who yearn to become self-sufficient.

Let me offer you an illustration of one woman's desire for self-sufficiency:

Shannon, a Mount Vernon Nazarene University student, was single with a small child living in a previously funded but subsequently sold HUD housing development. The neighborhood had deteriorated and become dangerous. Shannon wanted to move but could not afford alternative housing. Each day, after student teaching, she picked up her child from daycare and prayed, "Please do not let anything happen to me or my baby, help us survive another night." Shannon's story could be repeated many times over by other Mount Vernon Nazarene University students. I am pleased to report today that Shannon graduated with honors from our university and is a dedicated, influential teacher in the Mount Vernon school district.

Scripture teaches us:

‘You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they might see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.’

I believe passionately in faith-based higher education institutions. In the past thirty-five years, the 11,000 alumni of the institution I serve have been challenged to make a difference in the world. Other faith-based institutions can echo our experience. We solicit your assistance in significantly increasing our potential for influence by approving and strengthening the proposed HUD regulatory changes for faith-based organizations.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing with this esteemed body my perspectives based on twenty-five years of experience in higher education.

I am grateful.