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October 23, 2013

Mr. David A. Montoya  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 Seventh Street SW, Room 8256  
Washington, DC 20410-1000

Dear Mr. Montoya,

WJHL, a network news outlet in my district, recently reported that an alarmingly high number of people living in government-subsidized housing whose income now exceeds the allowable amount that qualifies them for assistance. I request that you look into this matter and report your findings to Congress.

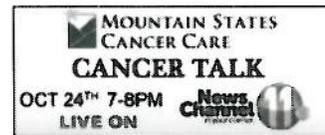
There are hundreds of desperate families in Johnson City alone who are eligible for assistance, but who are unable to get access to housing. I believe that we need an understanding of how pervasive this problem is so that Congress can consider any necessary corrective action.

I am attaching an article from WJHL highlighting this problem. If you need additional information from my office or have any questions, please contact Alex Large of my staff at (202) 225-6356 or [alex.large@mail.house.gov](mailto:alex.large@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,



Phil Roe, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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## SPECIAL REPORT: High incomes in public housing

Posted: Jul 15, 2013 7:06 AM EDT

Updated: Aug 26, 2013 7:06 AM EDT

By Nate Morabito, Investigative Reporter - [email](#)

(WJHL) - This is not what Brittany DeLargy wanted for her family, yet here she sits outside the Johnson City Housing Authority with her three year-old son and a baby on the way.

"You got to do what you've got to do when you're a mama and a wife," DeLargy said.

With her husband out of a job and her income just \$800 a month, her family will soon have to leave their apartment.

"I really need to get in somewhere immediately," DeLargy said. "I don't want to be homeless with (my kids)."

Her impending eviction brings her to the housing authority to fill out an application for government housing.

She joins a waiting list of 215 other people just like her, desperate to find a home. Some may have to wait more than a year for a place to rest their heads. Meanwhile, people who make much more than her are sleeping easy in a government apartment.

"It's very aggravating," DeLargy said. "You know there are people here that make more than enough money."

Area housing authorities are supposed to be there to help low-income families that can barely get by: single parents, the elderly and people with disabilities.

However after [several public records requests](#), we found out the people who need the help the most are on lengthy waiting lists, while those who've conquered poverty are, in some cases, taking advantage of your tax dollars.

Overall, we found 67 housing authority households across the region that are above federal poverty guidelines, even after you consider the number of people living in the home. Of those, children in 48 government apartments don't even qualify for free and reduced lunches.

### • [WEB EXTRA: High Incomes in Public Housing\(.pdf\)](#)

12 families make more than \$50,000 a year, one of which in Bristol, TN has lived in public housing for 17 years. Three of those take in more than \$60,000 annually and one makes \$76,855 a year.

The Johnson City Housing Authority is home to the largest number of households that made the most money last year. Seven took home more than \$50,000, including the family of five that made almost \$77,000 last year. The JCHA says the average income of a housing authority household is just \$11,196.

"That's way over what I'm making and I'm doing the best I can," DeLargy said.

JCHA Executive Director Richard McClain says those higher income households came to the housing authority, in some cases years ago, looking for help. Thanks to the government's assistance, he says they've since improved their situation. The executive director thinks some of those people are now making enough money to move out and buy their own home, which would open the door for those who really need a place to stay.

"That was the goal, why they came here, they've achieved their goal," McClain said. "It'd be a good time for them to move on...if their situation allows them to do it. I think that's our purpose here, to provide low-income people that are struggling with housing. That's our goal."

Unfortunately, McClain says some of those people are likely standing in the way of that goal, maybe even milking the system. He admits, some may have bad credit or other circumstances, leaving them unable to move out. However, others may not have that excuse.

"Possibly some are (taking advantage)," McClain said. "At that point you need to be working (to) clean up your credit or working through whatever issues you might have in your home, so that you can move on to other types of housing available."

By law, he says the housing authority can't kick these people out, but he says it can encourage them to move. That's why the housing authority is raising rates for some of its tenants beginning September 1st.

We presented our findings to Congressman Phil Roe (R-TN) who wondered if something needs to change at the federal level.

"Subsidized housing, that means that somebody's helping pay for your rent, a taxpayer is, we should be helping the neediest of people," Rep. Roe said. "People as they go up the income ladder, which is a great thing, that means you're a taxpayer and so forth, I think you need to move out of public housing into the private sector with the rest of us."

The congressman promised action starting with Congress' Oversight Investigation Subcommittee.

"I think we have to look at that," Rep. Roe said. "Let's just evaluate this. One good place to start with is the oversight responsibility that Congress has. (Let's) get the inspector general to look at the housing all over the country and find out if this is going on," Rep. Roe said. "I think that's a good idea."

According to Roe, if the problem is in fact widespread across the nation, the only solution would be to set income limits and guidelines.

"Legislation is what you have to do," Rep. Roe said. "You go to the committees of jurisdiction, you get a bill together and you begin to look at and debate that bill."

Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA) was also alarmed by our findings.

"This is a matter of concern," Rep. Griffith said. "I will review the law to see whether any changes are needed, or if this is an enforcement issue. Either way, it must be fixed so that people who really need the assistance receive it."

Despite her frustration, DeLargy is sympathetic too.

"What if those people have mental disabilities or what if they're disabled themselves?" she wondered.

After all, no matter their situation today, these higher income people were at one point in her shoes. Still, she says no one has to worry about her overstaying her welcome.

"I don't want to live here forever," DeLargy said. "I'd like to have my own house where my kid can grow up and say, 'This is my house and i grew up here.'"

She promises once she's off the waiting list, she'll only stay as long as necessary.

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