

Editorial: Fed housing overreach

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By:

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The Obama administration is demanding that communities receiving federal housing aid undertake what amounts to “Big Brother” social engineering.

The Department of Housing and Urban development recently promulgated its “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule” two years after publishing a draft for public comment.

It’s dismaying that the regulation attracted practically no mainstream notice. It requires HUD’s 1,800 municipal aid recipients to survey housing needs and identify barriers to “fair housing,” which in context can only mean a disproportion of minorities in any particular community, and take “meaningful actions” to rectify matters.

Race or ethnicity is not the only worry. HUD is piggy-backing what it sees as the needs of the poor into the equation. Think of it as an anti-snob zoning measure immeasurably beyond the incentive-based Chapter 40B in Massachusetts law.

Page 43 (of its 377 pages) says the rule is justified because the department has a duty under the Fair Housing Act of 1968 “to affirmatively further fair housing” and thus it may act “to counteract past policies and decisions that account for today’s racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty or housing cost burdens and housing needs that are disproportionately high for certain groups of persons based on characteristics protected by the Fair Housing Act.”

Those characteristics are “race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin or disability.” Poverty is not mentioned.

This is fact-neglecting, history-free ideology, waving away abundant research findings that not all segregated (racially or otherwise) housing was caused by prejudice, though much was, regrettably. That is surely illegal, but it is also declining.

Thomas Schelling, a Nobel Prize-winning economist at the University of Maryland, provoked that research with a 1971 mathematical demonstration of how unobjectionable preferences can lead different groups — not necessarily racial groups, conceivably Red Sox fans and Yankee fans — to settle down in clusters unintentionally.

Did “past policies or decisions” push Italian-Americans into the North End a century ago? To ask the question is to realize its vacuity. The next administration should start over.

