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MEMO

Regarding the Necessity for an Updated Housing Regulation
Southeast Utah Board of Health
6/15/21

The Southeast Utah Health Department (SEUHD) is updating its housing regulation for three central reasons. First, a desire to best serve and protect the unique interests of our Southeast Utah constituents. Second, a goal for the housing regulation to be in line with the housing regulations implemented by other health department jurisdictions. Third, our Environmental Health staff are managing complex housing complaints with increasing frequency.

In a jurisdiction with 12.5% of people living in poverty (compared to 8.9% in Utah), safe and sanitary housing is a critical tool to ensure and promote wellness within our population. Ensuring that both the tenant and landlord are supported by regulation is a crucial step in promoting long term health and safety. Southeast Utah has unique communities that deserve excellent public health service. Failing to reform the housing regulation would not only put the integrity of the Southeast Utah Health Department at risk but also neglect our duty to protect basic human health.

In the numerous ways health and housing are connected, poverty is only the tip of the iceberg. Our three county jurisdiction possesses the highest hepatitis C rates in the state of Utah and like many communities in America, many of our constituents struggle with opioid abuse and mental illness. For the members of our community struggling with drug addiction, ensuring safe and sanitary housing provides them a foundation to begin working to overcome their addiction. This new regulation gives us more tools to ensure the vulnerable populations in our region have the adequate housing they deserve and need.

Simultaneously, mental illness and addiction can prevent a person from properly caring for their home, which leads to accumulation of detritus, refuse, and even fecal matter within, or surrounding, the dwelling. In these cases, it is critical to connect the occupant(s) with resources equipt to support their recovery. Thus, updating the SEUHD housing regulation is essential in fulfilling our responsibility to protect not only the current occupants, but also the public at large. Both of these groups are affected by situations of dilapidation, neglect, and disrepair. While it is

critical that we support the current occupants by creating a solution that supports their often specialized needs, SEUHD must also support property owners, future occupants, and neighbors. For instance, neighbors and property owners rely on us to help prevent the spread of harmful health hazards and eliminate unsanitary conditions. Lastly, by requiring and monitoring the proper maintenance and repair of these homes we protect future families from unknowingly damaging their long term health.

SEUHD examined the housing regulations of other jurisdictions as guidance to help improve the housing regulation. While SEUHD recognizes that Southeast Utah is not Salt Lake County, it is critical that, as Carbon, Emery, and Grand counties continue to grow, all available resources are used to benefit SEUHD's jurisdiction. This three county area is uniquely situated as a rural/frontier region that oftentimes can be difficult to reach. With this in mind, as these populations expand, healthy housing is a critical priority. An example of working to align SEUHD's regulation with others is the requirement that housing complexes or mobile home parks with more than 16 units employ a manager on site. Environmental Health Scientists around the state view this rule as essential to ensuring compliance and clear communication between health departments and housing complexes or mobile home parks. Communities in SEUHD's jurisdiction are beginning to grow significantly, and as the state continues to expand it is only natural for more people to migrate towards Southeast Utah. For this reason, it is within our jurisdiction's best interest to update the Housing Regulation to fit our population's developing needs.

Some of the additions to this 2021 regulation reflect solutions to the challenged SEUHD's environmental health staff frequently face while responding to complaints, especially those involving rental units. Serious public safety concerns arise when Landlords turn off water, sewer, or electricity during an eviction or other lease dispute with a tenant in an attempt to force the tenant out. In SEUHD's experience, this often leads to situations where improper waste disposal and unsanitary living conditions can harm both the occupants and those living in the surrounding community. To remedy this problem, SEUHD added a provision which states that landlords can not turn off utilities as a means of eviction. It is important to note that this does not prevent utilities from being turned off due to non payment or other similar issues. In addition, tenants or landlords often fail to communicate when they notice an issue with the housing unit resulting in the issues compounding and becoming a greater problem. For example a small water leak left unfixed results in an extensive mold issue. To help mitigate this issue, SEUHD added a provision that states tenants should notify their landlord in a timely manner after noticing issues with their housing unit. These two examples serve as reasons why it is critical to update and expand the housing regulation to better protect public health and support SEUHD staff.

Attached are several photos exemplifying the variety and severity of many of the housing complaints and issues recently investigated by SEUHD staff.



Image 1: Roof physically separating from trailer, associated severe water damage throughout trailer in Ferron. Example of low density housing issue.



Image 1a: Walls separating from a rented trailer floor and frame in Moab.



Image 2: Lack of furnace coupled with dangerous wiring practice in Melody Estates Mobile home park. Example of High density housing issue.



Image 3: Major sewer Leak in Melody Estates Mobile home park, Example of high density housing issue.



Image 4: Major detritus and refuse in homes in East Carbon and Helper city



Image 5: Refuse, animal fecal matter inside an East Carbon Home



Image 6: Bathroom with no shower wall in East Carbon home.



Image 7: unprotected and recessed electrical socket in child's bedroom in Price home.



Image 8: Sewer backup in carbonville mobile home park.



Image 9: Top, Sewer and Gray water backing up into a child's bathtub. Bottom, same home as top image, Wastewater backing up out of a clean out into front yard of East Carbon Home.



Image 10: Trailer fire in Thompson Springs



Image 11: Major roof damage in East Carbon Home



Image 12: Detritus surrounding Helper City home