



Special Housing Edition

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Congrats Grads

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Committed to Cultural Diversity



Ivory N. Mathews, the new executive director for Home Forward (upper left), addresses the housing crisis during a meeting in Portland this month with President Biden's Housing Secretary, Marcia Fudge (center, head table), and other local officials, including members of Oregon's congressional delegation.

New Leader in Housing Crisis

Ivory Mathews takes helm at Home Forward

By BEVERLY CORBELL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

For Ivory Mathews, the first Black woman to lead public housing authority Home Forward, the job is a continuation of a life-long journey from poverty to activism.

Public housing has changed drastically over the years, even in Home Forward's decades long history for Portland and Multnomah County, she said, which in the past had harmful policies, as did other public housing organizations.

"When you look at all the properties that we purchased early on, they had harmful restrictions, like properties that might say only white people can live here," she said. "And in the early 1960s when fair housing came about, those things were supposed to have changed during that time."

But change has been a long time coming, and is still an ongoing process, and a recent memorandum from Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia L.



Ivory N. Mathews

Fudge directs all HUD organizations to eliminate barriers that prevent those with criminal histories from participating in HUD programs, examine all policies and report back by Oct. 14.

That work is already underway at Home Forward, Mathews said, as she promises to meet the deadline with ease.

"We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go," she said. "Home Forward is an organization that has over 80 years of harmful policies and we're doing the work to make sure that as a part

of our reparations is getting rid of those harmful policies."

That means "Creating a culture where people who are our residents, and where our community understands that we will no longer tolerate these inequities in providing services to the families that we serve," she said.

Over the years of working in public housing, Mathews said she realized that she wanted to work in her career at a higher level.

"I wanted to work my way up to the highest point of oversight in the affordable housing arena so that I can have the opportunity to sit on boards and talk to the media and try to provide truth and mitigate all this negative conversation about what affordable housing might mean to some people," she said.

That goal has come to fruition not only as executive director of Home Forward, but her recent appointment to the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, and as assistant chair for legislation for the National Association and Redevelopment Officials, both national organizations.

In addition to her work heading up the local office, as a member of those two

organizations, both based in Washington D.C., Mathews also has the opportunity to lobby for local support, and she's getting it.

"HUD is very responsive now," she said. "They're not just appeasing us, they're actually listening and coming back and giving us the autonomy that we need to do this work better."

Home Forward is much more than housing, Mathews said, more than brick and mortar.

"We look at our families from a 360-degree lens," Mathews said. "We care as much about putting a physical unit in place as we do about making sure that the family is thriving and that what we provide to individuals is more than a house. It's a place they can call home, something where they can live, and thrive and work, as any other citizen does in the city of Portland, or Multnomah County, or Gresham, or wherever our footprint is."

Part of that Home Forward lens is creating of a new strategic plan, Mathews said, which will be released in about a year.

That means a lot of internal work with

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