



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20410-0001

THE SECRETARY

December 20, 2001

This year our country has been challenged with acts of unprecedented hatred, yet we Americans are demonstrating renewed tolerance for people of different faiths. Now more than ever, it is important to support the celebration of diverse traditions and the joy of fellowship that comes with the holiday season.

This time of year many housing authorities are asked to give direction to residents, managers, and administrators regarding religious symbols or displays in common areas during holiday seasons.

As Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, I urge public housing directors not to prohibit such displays. It is not this Department's policy to discriminate against people of faith by barring the use of religious symbols to celebrate faith-based events, nor is it a result of HUD policy.

Under the First Amendment, government may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. This is among our most precious rights as Americans. HUD's policy, which follows prevailing case law, is that religious displays as well as non-religious symbols are permissible in common areas of public housing sites, and the same opportunity must be made available to people of all religious faiths. To the extent your policy concerning faith-based displays differs from HUD's, I would urge you to revise it.

With best wishes for a joyful holiday season,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mel Martinez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mel" and last name "Martinez" clearly legible.

Mel Martinez