



# FORMER HUD SECRETARY BENJAMIN S. CARSON'S ANTI- LGBTQ ACTIONS

An Evaluation Using the Cooper Design Method

## Abstract

Using the Cooper Design method, a framework for analyzing the alternatives and consequences of ethical decisions, this paper examines the former HUD Secretary Benjamin S. Carson Jr.'s regulatory actions against the LGBTQ community. This paper lays out the actions the Secretary the agency took under his administration and how it created an ethical dilemma directly contradicting the agency's mission.

The paper also scrutinizes the program against the virtue-based, intuition-based, and justice and fairness perspectives and provides alternative approaches through the eyes of these theories. Finally, this product includes a personal analysis of the ethical lessons I learned applying Cooper's Deign method to the former Secretary's actions.

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**The Facts:** The Secretary to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has the responsibility to uphold the agency's mission to "...create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all" (HUD, 2019). Yet, current HUD Secretary, Dr. Benjamin S. Carson, Sr, has demonstrated his dedication to harnessing inclusivity and combating discrimination shouldn't apply to our nation's lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community, more specifically transgendered persons. Sec. Carson's intolerance towards the transgender community was a major topic during his campaign for President, particularly after he referred to them as "abnormal" during an interview with Right Watch Wing blog in 2016 (RWW Blog, 2016). Shortly after Carson took oath at HUD Secretary, his Office also "ordered the removal" of various LGBTQ related materials on the agency's website, ended a survey project focusing on LGBTQ homelessness, and demanded its policy team "dissociate" itself from research on LGBTQ housing discrimination being conducted (MacGillis, 2017). Under Carson's authority, the agency has proposed regulatory revisions to its Equal Access rule; a regulation that addresses transgender discrimination in shelters. His proposed rule would allow HUD-funded programs to deny homeless transgendered persons access to shelter beds that coincide with their gender identity (Jan, T., 2019). Most recently, Carson's anti-LGBTQ views were further highlighted during a meeting in August with HUD staff where he equated the need for transgender women to access domestic violence shelters with "big hairy men" seeking to prey on vulnerable women (Tenbarga, T., 2019).

The **ethical dilemma**, in this case, resides in the tension between Sec. Carson's responsibility to uphold HUD's mission to combat discrimination and foster inclusivity against his demonstrated intolerance of the LGBTQ community.

**Ethical Issue:** How can Sec. Carson fulfill his responsibility to uphold HUD's mission to combat discrimination, as it applies to the agency's LGBTQ beneficiaries, without allowing his transphobic views to influence his authority?

**Alternatives:**

*Carson honors previous research and public input that led to the agency's Equal Access Rules and withdraws the proposed rule threatening its core tenements.*

Carson's current actions can limit access to emergency housing and further push the LGBTQ community away from crucial services. This consequence would deem his actions immoral, therefore the **teleological** ethicist would require Carson adhere to this alternative for his actions to result in an unbiased and hate-free consequence.

Additionally, this move upholds the **justice as fairness** theory, as the goal of HUD's Equal Access Rules is to ensure all programs are equal and inclusive for all.

**Consequence:** This alternative could result in two possible consequences. First, Carson's renewed enforcement of HUD's Equal Access rules will funnel much needed tools and research to help grantees foster inclusive programs. This alternative would also allow LGTBQ persons experiencing homelessness to access HUD programs, free from discrimination. However, another possible consequence is that the community won't trust Carson's motive, due to his persistent demonstration of transphobic views. This second possible consequence can lead to LGTBQ persons avoiding shelter programs.

*Carson resigns as HUD Secretary.*

This alternative takes the **deontological** approach which believes the motive of the actor is the core ethical concern. Even if Carson was to renew his dedication to the LGBTQ community, his words and actions are erasable and reprehensible. He has demonstrated such a deep hate and intolerance for the LGBTQ community he will be unable to fulfill his role at HUD Secretary in an unbiased manner. An ethicist evaluating this alternative through a **virtue-based** lens would agree to Carson's resignation since his tenure in office illustrates a leader lacking the character needed to advocate for the right to decent housing, free from discrimination.

**Consequence:** Several key leaders in President Trump's administration have illustrated anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. If Carson resigns, President Trump may appoint a successor with the same agenda. On the other hand, ousting Carson could strengthen HUD's reputation as being our Nation's fair housing agency which could increase LGTBQ trust in HUD programs.

**Preferred Alternative:** *Honor previous research and public input that led to the agency's Equal Access Rules, continue enforcing the rule, and withdraw the proposed rule threatening its core tenements.*

I chose this alternative based on a teleological perspective that the alternative providing the most good was most important. While I feel his agenda severely conflicts with HUD's mission, given the current political terrain, Carson's potential successor could be even more callous a leader. Thusly, his resignation may not lead to inclusive HUD programs, if the new Secretary continues to implement the proposed rule changes. This approach would also balance Secretary duties with HUD's overall principles to combat discrimination and build inclusive communities.

**Lessons Learned:** I had great difficulty selecting the alternative that best fits this situation and my values. As I evaluated the alternatives, I noticed I value both teleological and deontological ethical theories differently depending on the situation. It is a core belief of mine that one's ethics and values must be applied evenly in all situations. In this sense, no matter what Carson does, his motive will never align with the values inherent in advocating for fair housing. Yet, when

balancing this view against someone's need to access shelter, my ethical approach focused more on the alternative where the greatest good could be achieved most immediately. Revoking the proposed rule that threatens the fabric of providing equal services to this community seemed like the most immediate issue to be addressed.

I also learned how the political atmosphere, or external considerations, can have a significant impact on how one chooses to resolve an ethical dilemma. For example, if there was a moral and ethical administration in the White House, I would have chosen alternative two as I'd have more faith in the possibility of an ethical HUD Secretary to replace Carson.

## References

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