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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
AND NONPROFIT PARTNERS LAUNCH BOOK-RICH ENVIRONMENTS INITIATIVE  
TO BOOST EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN IN PUBLIC HOUSING**

**WASHINGTON** – In an effort to promote literacy and boost educational outcomes for kids in public housing across the country, the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Education (ED) are joining forces with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (GLR), the National Book Foundation (NBF) and the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) to launch the *Book-Rich Environment (BRE) Initiative*.

BRE aims to transform Public Housing Agencies (PHA) into book-rich environments by putting diverse, high quality books and other literacy tools into the hands of children and families living in HUD-assisted housing. BRE was inspired by recommendations by the President's My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Task Force, an initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by America's youth, and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential.

"This initiative will help ensure that young people, no matter where they live, have the tools they need to reach their full potential," said HUD Secretary Julián Castro. "HUD is proud to join forces with these public and private partners to boost literacy and educational opportunity for our nation's children."

"President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative seeks to build bridges of opportunity and break down barriers for boys and young men of color and for all students so they can reach their full potential," said U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. "The critical work to ensure an equal opportunity for every child requires true collaboration. We are pleased to join with partners across sectors to announce this innovative partnership with libraries, public housing authorities, and community organizations to give more children access to great books, literacy tools and a love of reading. If education is a ladder, then reading is a first step that can help our children reach places that would otherwise be an impossible climb."

Nearly 4 million low-income children are living in HUD-assisted housing across the country. BRE aims to foster a love of reading and to improve educational outcomes of children living in HUD-assisted housing by distributing free, high quality books to children, promoting literacy activities offered by local libraries and nonprofits, and by strengthening partnerships between PHAs, local public libraries and literacy partners to develop and deliver programming to improve educational outcomes of PHA residents.

"We applaud HUD and ED for launching this collaborative effort to ensure that public housing communities also are book-rich environments. This is a welcome affirmation of commitment to promoting early learning, early literacy and early school success," said Ralph Smith, managing director of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. "The GLR Campaign and its networks of partners will continue to support this Book Rich Environments as it rolls out in communities across the nation."

"The National Book Foundation's mission includes enhancing the cultural value of great writing in American and is committed to making sure all people, especially young people who are building their identity as readers, have access to great books," says National Book Foundation Executive Director Lisa Lucas. "By collaborating with these key national partners, we are able to build the Foundation's reach and further our mission of making sure that books matter, and that they matter everywhere."

"This unique partnership is in recognition of our nation's greatest treasure -- our children," said ULC CEO Susan Benton. "We are committed to working together to ensure that our kids and their families have books in their home, books and technology at their neighborhood library and all the support needed to become strong readers who will grow and thrive as adults. And that is exactly what we want for our kids and what this partnership aims to achieve."

The BRE initiative will launch in 35 communities across the country beginning next month. Public housing authorities will partner with local libraries, organized by the Urban Libraries Council, to host community book distribution events throughout 2017. At these events, public housing residents will have access to a diverse set of high quality books secured by the National Book Foundation (NBF). NBF worked with publishers such as Penguin Random House, the world's largest trade book publisher, which is providing 200,000 books towards the initiative, in furtherance of its mission to nourish a universal passion for reading. Hachette Book Group and Macmillan Publishers have also committed to substantial donations to the initiative. The distribution events will also serve as a platform to strengthen and launch new local partnerships with libraries, public housing authorities and nonprofits, organized by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, that can help ensure continued access to high quality literacy resources.

The initiative was announced Thursday at a press conference in Washington, D.C.'s Southwest Public Library alongside officials from the D.C. Public Library and the D.C. Public Housing Authority. "The District of Columbia Housing Authority is excited to be part of the Book-Rich Environment Initiative," said DCHA Executive Director Adrienne Todman. "We know how important it is for children to have access to books and the importance of nurturing lifelong readers. We are thankful for our collaboration with D.C. Public Library, and for the leadership of our federal partners."

Today's announcement builds on the foundation established by previous critical efforts between HUD and ED to build bridges between school and home, and improve educational and life outcomes for kids and families in HUD assisted housing, including joint efforts to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism, find ways to support college students with unmet financial needs, and create more summer opportunities for young people.

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