

Carson backs sale of public housing units

HUD secretary returns to Baltimore for series of events

By John Fritze The Baltimore Sun

Dr. Ben Carson, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said Thursday he wants to push a proposal to significantly expand a program that allows cities such as Baltimore to sell public housing units to private developers in order to raise money for repairs.

In a series of events in Baltimore — the city where he spent most of his career as a neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital — Carson repeatedly touted the program, which local officials embraced despite concerns among some public housing tenants about whether profit-driven developers would be as responsive as the government.

Carson, a former Baltimore County resident who now lives in Virginia, said during a brief interview with The Baltimore Sun that he favors lifting the nationwide cap of 225,000 public housing units that could be sold under the initiative, known as Rental Assistance Demonstration.

“In order to put a dent in the tremendous need for affordable housing, we’re going to have to switch to a different kind of model,” Carson said. “We need to improve upon that program, maybe lift the cap that exists. ... Those are the kinds of models that are going to help us not to continue to create blight.”

Carson’s support for lifting the cap is not a surprise — the department previously called for it in its budget proposal this year — but his focus on the idea during his visit to Baltimore underscores the extent to which private investment could become a driving philosophy at HUD as the agency contemplates billions of dollars in potential budget cuts.

The Rental Assistance Demonstration program — an Obama administration initiative that Baltimore adopted in 2014 — was the first policy Carson named when asked how his

