



July 12, 2017

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Collins and Ranking Member Reed:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2018 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we urge adequate funding for programs that serve poor and vulnerable households struggling to make ends meet. Increasing costs for housing have disproportionately impacted poorer Americans.

In *The Right to a Decent Home*, the Catholic Bishops of the United States noted, “Since decent housing is a human right, its provision involves a public responsibility. . . . Government must supplement and regulate the activities of private individuals and institutions in order to achieve our housing goals. A creative partnership of private enterprise and government is necessary” (no. 75). The Catholic Church, inclusive of all its ministries, is one of the largest private providers of housing services for the poor and vulnerable in the country. We serve as many as we can, yet lack the resources to assist all of our brothers and sisters in need. The reality is that we cannot do it alone, and in many cases government at every level is an important partner in our work.

Catholic Charities agencies provide housing services to over 450,000 people, including 31,000 permanent housing units and over 100,000 rental payments to keep clients in their homes. Despite these efforts, over 70 Catholic Charities agencies across the country continue to have waiting lists for housing. Indeed, over half of renters below the poverty line spend more than half of their income on housing. In response to such widespread unmet need, HUD programs need more resources, not less.

Unfortunately, housing and community development programs continue to be underfunded and are unable to meet the growing demand for affordable housing. An increase to the HUD budget is urged to provide robust funding for the following programs:

- **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance:** These programs provide a lifeline for low-income families in need of affordable housing. However, with home ownership at 20-year lows and demand for rental assistance continuing to rise, funding for these programs continues to fail to keep pace with the need for affordable housing.
- **Housing for the Elderly (Section 202):** Since its inception, “Section 202” programs have partnered with non-profit organizations, including faith-based organizations, to expand housing for low-income elderly families dramatically. Over this time nearly 400,000 units of housing for low-income elderly households have been produced. As the baby boomer generation enters retirement the need for new “Section 202 housing” construction is essential to meet the housing needs of seniors.
- **HOME Investment Partnership Program:** The need for affordable housing is at an all-time high and the HOME Investment Partnership Program is vital to mitigating the problem. This program

tangibly changes the lives of the poor by building, buying and rehabilitating affordable housing in blighted communities. Revitalizing buildings in poor communities serves as a catalyst for reducing crime and improving other social outcomes for poor citizens.

- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants:** The Continuum of Care program and Emergency Solutions Grants continue to make important contributions to reducing homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness. Necessary financial support for these programs improves efforts to address homelessness. Continued support for these programs is critical for working toward the goal of ending family homelessness.
- **Housing Counseling Assistance:** As the housing crisis demonstrated, greater consumer awareness can safeguard against abusive lending practices, and help to ensure that potential homeowners have the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. Continued support for counseling assistance can protect against future abuses in the housing market while at the same time helping individuals achieve the goal of responsible homeownership.
- **Community Development Block Grant:** Communities struggling to lift themselves out of poverty have turned to the CDBG for support in housing and economic development projects, including housing rehabilitation, blight removal, and infrastructure improvements. Economic development activities have created or supported over 400,000 jobs in the past ten years. Protecting these programs is vital to keep low-income communities from falling into disarray and allowing state and local governments the flexibility to continue identifying the areas and projects that are best suited to produce results.

In addition to the above programs, increased support for the Section 4 Capacity Development Block Grant, Housing for People with AIDS (HOPWA) and with Disabilities (Section 811), and Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) is necessary in order to continue to serve poor and vulnerable families across our country.

As you know, the effectiveness of federal housing programs has been hampered in recent budget and deficit agreements. While Congress still faces serious challenges in balancing needs and resources, and allocating burdens and sacrifices, these programs that help to satisfy the basic human right to shelter should receive special attention.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Frank J Dewane
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Sr. Donna Markham OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities USA