



March 18, 2015

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Collins and Ranking Member Reed:

We write to address the moral and human dimensions of the Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We urge you to adequately fund programs that serve poor and vulnerable households struggling to make ends meet.

As Catholics, we believe that housing is a human right, and that society has a shared obligation to ensure that individuals and families have access to safe and affordable housing. We see firsthand in our communities and in our parishes, the pain and suffering caused by homelessness and the lack of affordable housing. The Catholic community is one of the largest private providers of housing services for the poor and vulnerable in the country. We shelter the homeless, develop affordable housing for families and people with disabilities, counsel families at risk of foreclosure, and provide housing and care for those at the end of life. While we try to serve as many as we can, the reality is we cannot do it alone, and we see government at every level as an important partner in our work.

At a time of substantial unmet need, HUD programs need more resources, not less. We urge you to support robust funding for programs that serve poor and vulnerable people, such as **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance, Housing for the Elderly (Section 202) and People with Disabilities (Section 811), Housing for People with AIDS (HOPWA), Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH), McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance, and Housing Counseling Assistance**. Programs that provide resources to communities merit support as well.

We support the National Housing Trust Fund and are encouraged that it is finally scheduled to receive funding in 2016. We urge you to reject any effort to block funding for this important program.

The Census Bureau reports that housing assistance programs, despite substantial funding challenges in recent years, still reduced the poverty rate by one percent in 2013, ranking them among the more effective antipoverty interventions. As you know, these housing programs have not been protected in various budget and deficit agreements, limiting their effectiveness. Congress still faces serious challenges in balancing needs and resources, and allocating burdens and sacrifices. Effective antipoverty programs that help to meet a basic human need should receive special attention.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Sister Donna Markham, OP, Ph.D.
President Elect
Catholic Charities USA