



Office of Domestic Social Development
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Catholic Charities USA
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June 29, 2021

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
and Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
and Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Schatz and Ranking Member Collins:

Our Catholic organizations work with Congress every year on a range of our priorities, including protecting migrants, supporting the poor and vulnerable, and protecting the unborn. As you consider the Fiscal Year 2022 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we encourage you to increase investments for housing programs serving families and individuals who are poor and vulnerable.

The country is beginning to emerge from the devastating coronavirus pandemic which dealt an economic shock to millions of households. Congress has done important work to protect these families and individuals from losing their homes through support for vital housing and homelessness assistance programs, but that work is not done. Even before the pandemic struck, homelessness was increasing and nearly a quarter of renter households paid over half their income for housing. People of color experienced housing insecurity at much higher rates than their white peers because of generations of discrimination and disinvestment. Meanwhile, federal discretionary spending on housing assistance has fallen to historic lows as a percentage of GDP. Even as the number of households struggling to keep a roof over their heads has increased, the number receiving federal rental assistance has remained stagnant. Flat funding for housing and community development programs acts as a cut to vital services. An increase in funding for housing programs is needed to address the shortage of affordable housing supply, keep pace with market rates to maintain housing for at least the same number of people currently served, and reduce existing inequities.

In our pastoral statement *The Right to a Decent Home*, the Catholic bishops of the United States have said and continue to believe, “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 our brothers and sisters in need. In 2020, Catholic Charities agencies provided housing services to over 180,000 people and homelessness services to nearly 403,000. Despite these efforts, Catholic Charities agencies have over 73,000 households across the country on waiting lists for housing. In response to such widespread unmet need, HUD programs need more resources, not less.

We urge an increase to the HUD budget to provide robust funding for the following programs:

- **Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Project-Based Section 8 Rental Assistance, and the Public Housing Capital Fund and Operating Fund:** These tenant- and project-based rental assistance programs provide a lifeline for low-income families in need of affordable housing. However, with the supply of affordable rental homes decreasing and demand for rental assistance continuing to rise, funding for these programs continues to fail to keep pace with the need for affordable housing.

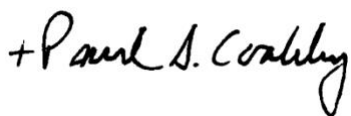
- **Housing for the Elderly (Section 202) Program:** Since its inception, “Section 202” programs have partnered with non-profit organizations, including faith-based organizations, to expand housing for low-income elderly families. Over this time, nearly 400,000 units of housing for low-income elderly households have been produced, but construction of new units has dramatically decreased over the past decade. As the nation’s population rapidly ages and 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. Continued support for these programs is critical for working toward the goal of ending family homelessness.
- **Housing Counseling Assistance:** As the housing crisis and pandemic demonstrated, families and individuals are at greater risk of losing their housing due to loss of income, rising medical costs and other factors. Increased support for housing counseling can provide assistance to renters seeking more affordable and stable housing choices, support those facing the risk of homelessness, advocate for those homeowners facing foreclosure and default and educate homebuyers through greater awareness to safeguard against abusive lending practices and help to ensure that potential homeowners have the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. Increased support for counseling assistance can protect against future abuses in the housing market while helping families and individuals achieve the goal of homeownership.
- **Community Development Block Grant Program:** For many years, 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 for development in low-income communities and allows 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. Further, the freedom of faith-based shelters to continue serving thousands of people in need at this time without violating their beliefs or the safety of their clients should be protected in any appropriations measure.

Robust investments in federal housing programs equip families and communities with the resources they need to thrive. The above programs satisfy the basic human right to shelter and should receive special attention, and thus, have our strong support as we continue to serve those in need.

Thank you for your consideration and support of people and families in need of stable housing.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops



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The Honorable David E. Price
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
and Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
and Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart:

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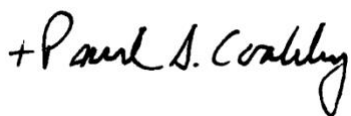
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