



Office of Domestic Social Development
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Catholic Charities USA
2050 Ballenger Avenue
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Alexandria, VA 22314
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May 13, 2019

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2020 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 housing costs have burdened poorer Americans as wages have not kept pace with this expense. Adequate housing funding is then essential.

The Right to a Decent Home, the 1975 pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, notes, “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 poor and vulnerable people in the country. We serve as many as we can yet lack the necessary resources to assist all 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 70,000 people, including 35,000 permanent housing units and over 17,000 rental payments to keep clients in their homes. Despite these efforts, over 25 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, forcing them to make tradeoffs and forego other necessities, such as food, healthcare, and transportation. 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 the robust funding needed in the following programs:

- **\$24 billion for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, \$12.8 billion for Project-Based Section 8 rental assistance, \$5 billion for the Public Housing Capital Fund and full funding for the Public Housing 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.
- **At least \$678 million for the 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 dramatically. 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 baby boomer generation enters

retirement the need for new “Section 202 housing” construction is essential to meet the housing needs of seniors.

- **\$1.5 billion for the 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.
- **\$3 billion for 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.
- **At least \$55 million for 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.
- **At least \$3.3 billion for the Community Development Block Grant Program:** 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 to continue to effectively serve poor and vulnerable families across our country.

Rigorous investments in federal housing programs equip families and communities with the resources they need to thrive. 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 and funding.

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



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The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2020 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 housing costs have burdened poorer Americans as wages have not kept pace with this expense. Adequate housing funding is then essential.

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