



March 4, 2016

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 Chair Collins and Ranking Member Reed:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2017 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.

In 2014 Catholic Charities agencies provided housing services to over 500,000 people, including permanent housing for over 33,000 and emergency shelter to over 10,000 people every night. Despite these efforts, over 70 Catholic Charities agencies across the country continue to have waiting lists for housing. Indeed, according to HUD only 25 percent of households that qualify for housing assistance actually receives it. In response to such widespread unmet need, HUD programs need more resources, not less.

Unfortunately, housing and community development programs received a relatively small portion of the increased resources in the last appropriations cycle. We urge you to correct this oversight and 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. However, from 2003 to 2013 elderly, very low-income renters increased by 21 percent; with the baby boomer generation entering retirement years this demand for housing is expected to increase.
- **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. Last year’s increased financial support for these programs improved 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 taught us, 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.

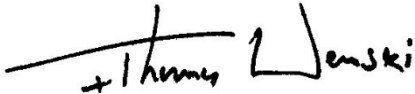
- **Capacity Building and Affordable Housing Program (Section 4):** The Section 4 Capacity Building and Affordable Housing Program is HUD's only dedicated source of funding for increasing the effectiveness of local community and nonprofit development organizations. Given the tremendous needs that these organizations are working to meet, the Section 4 program should remain a stand-alone program and continue to receive robust support.

In addition to the above programs, increased support for the Community 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.

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 still fall short of serving all our brothers and sisters in need. The reality is we cannot do it alone, and in many cases government at every level is an important partner in our work.

As you know, the effectiveness of these 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 Thomas G. Wenski
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



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