

February 22, 2016

Dear Chair Cochran, Vice Chair Mikulski, Chair Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey:

The organizations listed below urge you to increase the 302(b) allocation to the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) to the highest possible level for fiscal year (FY) 2017. The list below includes [redacted] national, state, and local business, transportation, housing and community development, faith-based, disability, civil rights, and anti-violence organizations, as well as officials in municipal, tribal and state governments.

The FY2017 THUD subcommittee allocation will equip the nation's communities to address pressing transportation and housing priorities, reduce homelessness, improve roads, bridges and transit, and spur community development. Each of these efforts is tied to the economic prosperity of cities, counties and states nationwide. Communities rely on adequate funding of THUD programs to help create new jobs and maintain healthy, accessible, and thriving surroundings for all of their residents. The social and economic returns that a strong THUD allocation provides are more crucial than ever in the challenging fiscal environment imposed by the Budget Control Act's (BCA) nondefense discretionary funding caps.

For the Department of Transportation (DoT), an elevated FY2017 THUD allocation would enable Congress to fulfill the promise of the FAST Act and allow communities to enhance their infrastructure and mass transit investments while moving people and goods more efficiently. Key discretionary grant programs like New Starts and TIGER are critical investments in local communities that create new jobs, help more workers get to employment and foster regional economic growth. Transportation systems are a lifeline to opportunity, connecting people to jobs, schools, affordable housing, health care, grocery stores, and other vital community resources. However, not all residents have adequate transportation access. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Civil Rights Division, 15 million people in this country have difficulty getting the transportation they need. Declining funding in recent years has exacerbated this problem and without an adequate THUD allocation, access promises to become more challenging. A strong FY2017 allocation will support the infrastructure investments that fuel local economies and connect individuals to economic opportunity.

Department of Housing and Urban Development programs play a critical role in revitalizing communities and helping families, people with disabilities, and seniors to afford housing and avoid homelessness. Indeed, 4 out of 5 rental units that are affordable and available to extremely low income Americans are supported by federal rental assistance, according to a recent analysis by the Urban Institute. Moreover, through targeted investments in rental assistance, Congress has helped communities to achieve impressive reductions in veterans' and chronic homelessness over the past five years. Recent funding cuts have undermined HUD programs, however, reducing the availability of rental assistance for low income families, straining local housing agencies' efforts to maintain and preserve public housing, diminishing the resources available to revitalize distressed communities, and undermining efforts by Mayors, Governors, business leaders, and others around the country to end homelessness for veterans and for children, youth, and families, and to end chronic homelessness. Given increases in rents and operating costs, a strong increase in the FY2017 allocation for the THUD subcommittees is required to provide needed rental assistance for currently-assisted families, and to keep federal efforts to end homelessness on track.

Community development assistance provided by HUD is vital for rural, urban and suburban areas to revitalize distressed communities, aid in the prevention and elimination of blight, address urgent community needs, and to provide for critical public facilities and improvements, public services, housing, and economic development. HUD's community development programs have been cut drastically in the last five years. Further reductions in community development funding will halt the growth of local economies and the provision of these essential projects and services, such as clean water lines, sewer lines, health centers, road improvements, elderly services, job training, and other assistance to low and moderate income citizens.

State and local governments, and the communities they serve, rely on the resources provided to DoT and HUD by the THUD bill to meet the most basic infrastructure needs of their communities. These infrastructure needs, including for transportation, community development, and affordable housing, exist in every community across the country. The provision of additional federal resources through tested, effective DoT and HUD programs will allow America's neighborhoods to thrive and for the needs of more of our most vulnerable residents to be met.

We urge you to make a strong THUD 302b allocation a top priority.

Sincerely,