

April 27, 2009

Senator Patty Murray, Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation and
and Housing and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Senator Christopher Bond, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation
and Housing and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Bond:

As you develop the FY 2010 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, we write in support of a \$2.2 billion funding level for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants.

As you well know, homelessness persists as one of our nation's most challenging social problems. On any given night, 672,000 people are homeless in America. As many as 3.5 million people will experience homelessness at some point during the year—and up to 1.35 million of those will be children. Alarming, approximately 42 percent of homeless individuals are unsheltered, living in parks, cars, and campsites.

The current economic downturn has precipitated troubling changes as people who are already struggling to make ends meet find themselves at an increased risk of becoming homeless. Estimates of the severity of the current recession suggest that an additional 1.5 million Americans may experience homelessness during the next two years. Of particular concern is the potential increase in the number of homeless families. Family homelessness is traumatic for both children and adults as it disconnects individuals from schools and communities and results in more expenses for local shelter systems.

As a result of the Subcommittee's support over the past several years, HUD's homeless assistance programs have helped local service providers maintain a safety net and create pathways back to permanent, affordable housing. These grants also encourage innovative approaches to prevent and shorten episodes of homelessness, such as rapid rehousing. Further, these funds support communities in the creation of a seamless continuum of care, including street outreach to help the homeless access mainstream services and supportive housing, emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent housing, and the services necessary for homeless persons to return to and maintain safe and stable living arrangements.

Increasing the funding level for FY10 to \$2.2 billion will enable communities to meet both the emergency needs of people experiencing homelessness and to advance permanent solutions to the crisis. Specifically, it will allow communities to apply an appropriate mix of interventions to end homelessness, including homelessness prevention activities, emergency shelters, transitional housing, supportive services, and 15,000 new units of permanent housing in order to reach the estimated 150,000 units required nationally.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to preventing homelessness as evidenced by its work to include \$1.5 billion for homelessness prevention in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. However, we would urge you to view this funding in the emergency context in which it was provided. These funds will be targeted to prevent those affected by the economic crisis from falling into homelessness. Only additional investments will enable communities to make further progress towards the goal of identifying and enacting permanent solutions to the problem of homelessness.

As economic indicators continue to worsen, it is imperative that the nation not lose ground in the struggle against homelessness. Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan continue to be at risk of homelessness due to their higher incidence of mental health and physical injuries. Also at risk are the millions of Americans who may face a layoff in this economic environment. At the same time, the ongoing foreclosure crisis threatens not only homeowners but unsuspecting renters who are in danger of being displaced.

More than 300 communities nationwide have developed plans to end homelessness, many with support from Homeless Assistance Grants. This funding played a key role in the reduction in homelessness between 2005 and 2007, and can continue to be an important catalyst in communities. As such, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee to build on and nurture this progress by supporting \$2.2 billion for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants in the FY 2010 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill.

Thank you for considering this request, and for your continuing leadership in helping to end homelessness in the United States.

Sincerely,
