

April 26, 2010

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

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

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Bond:

As you develop the FY 2011 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, we write in support of a \$2.4 billion funding level for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Homeless Assistance Programs to fully implement the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, signed into law last year.

As you know, homelessness persists as one of our nation's most challenging social problems. Based on the 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, which HUD released in July 2009, we know on any given night, more than 664,000 people are homeless in America. Among these people, more than 124,000 are chronically homeless, more than 249,000 are persons in families, and about 15 percent are veterans. Over the course of a year, nearly 1.6 million people use emergency or transitional housing programs. Unfortunately, these numbers are more than a year old, and the current economic downturn has only likely increased the number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

As you know, the HEARTH Act restructured HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs to incorporate nearly two decades of research and on-the-ground experience in ending homelessness. HUD homeless assistance funds are distributed through a unique competitive process called the Continuum of Care in which federal funding is driven by the local decision-making process. Communities have worked to establish more cost-effective continuums that identify and fill the gaps in housing and services that are needed to move homeless families and individuals into permanent housing.

The HEARTH Act codified the Continuum of Care process, and FY 2011 would be the first year for implementation of this and other important features of the HEARTH Act. These features include increased investment in the evidence based practices of homelessness prevention and permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals and families with special needs; the transformation of the HUD supported homeless assistance system to a more performance based and outcome focused orientation; and provision of assistance that better recognizes the needs of rural communities.

In December 2009, HUD announced renewal funding to support nearly 190 thousand transitional and permanent housing beds. Despite this investment, the problem remains a large one because nearly 1.6 million people are served by emergency shelter and transitional housing programs over the course of a year. To help close this gap, we respectfully request \$2.4 billion in funding for HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs to fully implement the HEARTH Act. Robust funding will continue progress in reducing chronic homelessness (20 percent reduction between 2006-2008) and meet the growing needs among homeless families during this period of economic hardship (9 percent increase from 2007-2008).

As we continue the climb out of the economic downturn, it is imperative that the nation not lose ground in the struggle against homelessness, especially among Americans who have lost jobs through no fault of their own, those homeowners and families that are struggling due to the ongoing foreclosure crisis, and our veterans. Unfortunately, veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, continue to be at risk of homelessness due to their higher incidence of mental health and physical injuries. As such, we also encourage the Subcommittee to provide robust funding for HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program. It is imperative that we do all we can to ensure that those who have served our country honorably do not then find themselves homeless.

In closing, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee fully implement the HEARTH Act and provide \$2.4 billion of funding for the Homeless Assistance Programs in the FY 2011 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill.

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

Sincerely,

Jack Reed

Olympia J. Snowe

Charles E. Schumer