United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20th, 2015

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing, and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing, and Urban Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Reed,

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, we urge you to strongly support the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Homeless Assistance Programs, as modernized by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, and the Section 8 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program.

Homelessness persists as one of our nation's most pressing social problems and has grown more challenging in the wake of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Based on the 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, which HUD released in October 2014, on any given night, 578,474 people are homeless in America. Among these people, about 15 percent, or 84,291 are chronically homeless individuals and 216,197 are persons in families. Nearly one-quarter of all homeless people were children under the age of 18. Now, more than ever, robust funding for Homeless Assistance Programs must be a priority so we can ensure that all individuals and families who are facing homelessness have a safe place to stay.

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. These funds are distributed through a unique, competitive process called the Continuum of Care, which is driven by local decision-making. Communities have worked to establish more cost-effective continua that identify and fill the gaps in housing and services that are needed to move homeless families and individuals into permanent housing.

As we continue to recover from 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 who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, continue to be at a high risk of homelessness due to their elevated incidence of mental and physical injuries. It is imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that those who have served our country honorably do not then find themselves homeless.
In addition, we urge the Subcommittee to meet the President's request of $21.1 billion for Tenant-Based Rental Assistance to restore 67,000 vouchers cut by sequestration. The President

has proposed to target 30,000 of the 67,000 restored vouchers to assist families, veterans (including veterans who are ineligible for VASH vouchers), and tribal families who are homeless, victims of domestic violence, and families with children who are at risk of being separated due to their inability to afford adequate housing. Building on the success of the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Program in reducing veterans' homelessness by more than 30 percent since 2010, this proposal would help communities to make further progress in reducing homelessness among veterans and other vulnerable individuals and families.
In closing, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee robustly support the Homeless Assistance and Section 8 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Programs in the FY 2016 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill.

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

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Charles Schumer
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Richard Durbin
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Christopher Murphy
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
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