

Organizational Sign on Letter to HUD Secretary Dr. Ben Carson:

Dear Secretary Carson:

A home of one's own is essential to health, education, public safety, and employment opportunity. Federal programs – delivered through capable and efficient service organizations - have provided a hand up to countless families in Pennsylvania. For many, a small amount of assistance is what has enabled them to change their life trajectory.

There has been remarkable bipartisan support at the federal, state, and local levels for preventing and ending homelessness, combating blight, and utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credits to create more housing for lower income households. Here in Pennsylvania, HUD programs have provided stability and hope to thousands of individuals and families, allowing them to significantly improve their life circumstances. We believe that:

- **If you work hard and play by the rules, you ought to be able to afford a decent place to live.**
- **Senior citizens and people with disabilities should be able to live independently, safely, and with dignity in homes in the community instead of institutions.**
- **No child should experience homelessness, in fact no one should.**

Federal housing programs bolster these core American values. We would like to highlight the ways that these programs have helped local governments, nonprofit organizations including faith-based organizations, and private developers remediate blight, reduce homelessness, support homeowners, and provide quality rental homes within reach of low wage workers and people on fixed incomes. **We urge you to support full funding for these proven, effective housing and community development programs.**

1. Support and expand the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program.

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit has led to the development of more than 84,000 affordable, privately owned and managed apartments serving more than 200,000 Pennsylvanians. The creation of these homes has spurred economic growth, generated billions of dollars in local and state revenues, and reduced blight. As an added bonus, research has shown that it enhances communities by increasing the value of nearby homes and stabilizing neighborhoods. According to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, an annual \$30 million through the tax credits generates \$300 million dollars in investment in housing.

There is unique value in the housing credit being included in the tax code because of the high degree of accountability built into it. Investors can claim credits only after properties are built and occupied by income-eligible residents at affordable rents. Private investors – not the federal government – provide all of the equity up front and bear the financial risk.

2. Set a goal of ending homelessness.

The issue of homelessness has long received bipartisan support. It was President George W Bush that first set his sights on ending chronic homelessness and due to his leadership, rates of chronic homelessness have dropped across the nation.

Even with all of the effort dedicated to solving this issue there are still too many people experiencing homelessness in PA, including veterans, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living with mental illness, and children. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the year in an American's life when they are most likely to experience homelessness is from age zero to one. Many others experiencing homelessness have been knocked down by economic insecurity, through job loss and community disinvestment.

For many people experiencing homelessness, a decent, safe, affordable home is all they need. For others, especially those living with mental illness, permanent supportive housing provides the answer. Permanent supportive housing is an affordable home linked with a flexible array of services designed to keep people with multiple illnesses, disabilities, and / or health conditions stably housed. HUD has prioritized the creation and funding of permanent supportive housing because it works and it is much more cost effective for taxpayers than providing emergency shelter, emergency room medical care, and other costs associated with homelessness.

3. Maintain and increase federal programs that allow rural communities to fight blight.

Hundreds of thousands of blighted or abandoned buildings are spread across Pennsylvania, impeding community and economic development and conveying images of old, worn out communities. Numerous studies across the nation, including in PA, have documented the significant loss of tax revenue and the burden that blighted properties place on local government.

Abandoned land, when transformed into productive re-use, is a critical opportunity for our older communities to modernize, revitalize, and grow, and to improve the quality of life for neighbors who are already there. New laws passed in Pennsylvania with bipartisan support have begun to provide a set of tools to transform blighted and

abandoned property into quality homes people can afford, and new businesses and industries that create local jobs. Coupled with the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, communities across the state, including underserved rural areas, can use these new tools to remediate blight.

4. Support a healthy level of funding for the HUD programs that stabilize families and communities.

For every 100 renter households with extremely low incomes, there are only 35 affordable and available homes in Pennsylvania. Stated another way, there is a statewide shortage of 277,000 rental homes that are both affordable and available for households earning about \$22,000 a year or less, and that shortage has consistently grown over the last decade.

HUD administers an array of programs that enable local communities to address a continuum of housing needs. These programs range from providing housing assistance to those that are experiencing homelessness through the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Grant program to stabilizing working families through Housing Choice Vouchers and public housing to encouraging homeownership through HOME funded homeownership opportunities and vital housing counseling programs. Recent research has shown that not only do Housing Choice Vouchers stabilize housing for families, they also improve family well-being.

5. Focus needed resources on our nation's housing infrastructure.

Infrastructure is the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities that are needed for the operation of our society and we do not have the necessary infrastructure without adequate housing. We see safe, quality, affordable homes as essential for the prosperity of our society.

Pennsylvania's housing stock is aging and in desperate need of repair. Businesses, especially those located or interested in locating in Pennsylvania's small and rural communities, need workforce housing in order to attract qualified workers. To adequately shore up the nation's infrastructure, housing and community development must be prioritized.

We stand ready to partner with you and the Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation to build on the successes of these programs to provide more families with additional opportunity to better their lives.
