

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee Testimony

April 18, 2017

Thank you to Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Price and members of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee for hearing my testimony today. I will cover both housing funds and transportation issues.

In my district, Washington's 7th, housing affordability is one of the biggest challenges we face. Seattle's median home value is \$740,700, and home values skyrocketed by 18% in just 2017 alone. Median rent prices are a staggering \$2,500. Seattle is expected to have the highest cost of living increase in the US this year. As the cost of living increases, it is our responsibility to ensure that low and middle-income individuals and families can continue to call Seattle home.

Because costs are rising so steeply, Seattle is experiencing a homelessness crisis. Last year's annual Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness totaled 11,600 homeless individuals in King County, with 5,485 people living unsheltered, seventy percent of whom are living in Seattle. Many of these individuals are veterans; many are members of the LGBTQ community; and many are our city's youth.

Federal funding can go a long way toward eradicating homelessness and expanding access to affordable housing. As you review funding levels for FY19, I urge you increase funding for important housing funds including Section 8, Community Development Block Grants and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants.

These funds are crucial for local governments and non-profits that are working hard to make sure that everyone has access to safe, stable housing in congressional districts around the country.

The Seattle Housing Authority has used a patchwork of funds to ensure that people like Marvin can transition from years of addiction and experiencing homelessness in Seattle's most dangerous areas to seven years of sobriety, a stable job and an apartment of his own. And they helped Jill—a single mother aspiring to be a nurse—gain affordable housing. She is now enrolled at Seattle University's College of Nursing. These federal funds change people's lives. They allow them to have the stability to get back on their feet and pursue their dreams in education, the workforce and life.

Section 8 is vital to creating success stories like these, and last year my district received \$17.7 million in Section 8 funding. For FY19, I urge you to appropriate \$22.8 billion for Section 8, specifically \$20.6 billion for renewals, \$110 million for new vouchers, \$1.9 billion for administrative fees and \$190 million to renew approximately 14,000 "mainstream" vouchers.

Mr. Chairman, the dedicated organizations working on these issues stretch these funds to help as many people as they can. The Low Income Housing Institute used a combination of funding sources to construct Marion House, which is a mixed-use affordable housing apartment building in Seattle that has 49 studio apartments, 20 of which are affordable apartments for homeless youth and 29 of which are for low-wage workers who are just getting their start in the workforce. They incorporated crucial wrap-around services like onsite supportive services, a food bank and a job training café.

The Downtown Emergency Service Center uses McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants to house some of Seattle's most vulnerable populations in both traditional emergency shelters and innovative settings that embrace the housing first model. Last year, my district received almost \$14 million in funding for these crucial programs. I urge you to increase funding for FY19 to \$2.8 billion.

I also urge you to increase funding for the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS program, because people living with HIV and AIDS are far more vulnerable to becoming homeless. It can also reduce the transmission of HIV, improve patient health and save costs on emergency and inpatient services. Last year, my district received more than \$2 million in HOPWA funding, and the need continues. I urge you to increase funding for FY19 to \$393 million.

We must continue to make robust investments in affordable housing and programs that will help eradicate homelessness. We cannot backslide.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to Transportation, I want to highlight two important aspects. The first is passenger train safety and the second is ensuring that the Department of Transportation honors its commitments to our nation's communities.

With respect to passenger rail, in December 2017, the Seattle area became the latest community to experience tragedy when Amtrak Cascades 501 travelling from Seattle to Portland, Oregon carrying 80 passengers and seven crew members derailed near Olympia, Washington. Three Washingtonians died and nearly 100 people needed hospital care.

For our communities in the Pacific Northwest, this terrible accident was a stark reminder of the importance in investments in passenger rail safety. The FY 2018 Omnibus included nearly \$2 billion for Amtrak and my hope is that the national network of passenger rail—both state-supported services and long distance—will be robustly supported this year, with a serious eye toward passenger rail safety. As well, the subcommittee's support of over \$250 million in Positive Train Control grants is critical. I urge the subcommittee to use its FY 2019 bill to ensure that deadlines for implementing PTC does not slip.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased that this subcommittee provided \$100 million in FY 2017 under the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program for Sound Transit's Lynwood Link Extension connecting north Seattle to Lynwood. Sound Transit submitted last month all the required paperwork to the FTA in order to execute the Full Funding Grant Agreement this summer. However, I am concerned that the Department of Transportation is not living up to its side of the deal. Mr. Chairman, the Secretary's signature on Full Funding Grant Agreements guarantee that our communities don't get left holding the bag for the federal share of these critical projects. That's why I was very pleased that the subcommittee included language in the FY 2018 Omnibus that sets a clear deadline for the department to commit to releasing the funds. I urge you to continue to push the Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration to implement the law and sign FFGAs in a timely manner.

Thank you again to Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Price and all members of the subcommittee for welcoming me and hearing my testimony on these important funding sources.