

TESTIMONY OF
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REGARDING
Flexible Federal Funding: Examining the Community Development Block Grant Program and Its
Impact on Addressing Local Challenges

BEFORE
The House Committee on Financial Services and Subcommittee on Housing, Community
Development, and Insurance

ON BEHALF OF THE
National Association of Regional Councils

Thank you, Chairman Cleaver, Ranking Member Hill, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kim Robinson, and I am the Executive Director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), the regional planning agency for 43 communities in the Springfield, Massachusetts area.

I am testifying on behalf of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), which serves as the national voice for regions by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues.

NARC members include regional councils, councils of governments (COGs), regional planning and development agencies, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and other regional organizations. Members work collaboratively with their communities – large and small, urban and rural – to address their citizens’ needs and promote a regional approach to planning for the future.

NARC has been a strong advocate for CDBG since its inception, as it has a proven track record of assisting low-income neighborhoods in communities of all sizes across the country. It is a critical tool in our members’ efforts to address poverty, inequity, economic development, and infrastructure needs. Its unique flexibility allows us to direct federal resources to frequently changing areas that are most in need each year.

While most CDBG entitlement communities have populations of over 50,000, the program’s reach goes far beyond that threshold. As you know, each state also receives a CDBG allocation to be used in non-entitlement communities, and my state of Massachusetts received

over \$35 million for that purpose in FY 2021 alone. In this regard, CDBG cannot be viewed simply as a “big city” program.

Of the 43 communities that are members of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, only four are CDBG entitlement communities. PVPC provides technical assistance to many of our communities when they seek CDBG funds for various projects. PVPC both applies for funding and also administers the grants on behalf of these communities.

In FY 2019, PVPC worked with 19 different communities, with populations ranging from 500 to 40,000 residents. We have aided over 30 municipalities since 1988.

In order to encourage regional cooperation, the state increases the minimum allocation that a non-entitlement community can receive if they join with one or two other communities for regional efforts. The regional approach here in the Pioneer Valley has led to the long term stability for services in many of our towns. A perfect example of this is the Southern Hilltowns regional applications, which have been funded since the mid-1980s. Some of the services here include infrastructure projects, a food pantry, senior programming and a domestic violence prevention program.

As another example, we have assisted the Town of Agawam, a non-entitlement community, in applying for and administering CDBG funding for a variety of uses in the community. This includes improvements and repairs at an assisted housing site, a disabled accessibility study for the Town Hall, an infrastructure study of one of the Town’s most densely populated neighborhoods, and grants to small businesses with CARES Act funds.

CDBG is a valuable program that works locally to address substandard housing, poor or non-existent infrastructure, pockets of decline and neighborhood development. It provides the resources and tools that enable local communities to design flexible strategies to address these issues. CDBG is also an important leveraging tool for local communities to gain access to other funding sources. Every \$1.00 of CDBG invested in communities leverages another \$4.09 in private and public investment.

CDBG is an impactful program; creating strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. The program is a model in efficiency and effectiveness; using strategic planning and coordination to assist millions of low-and moderate-income people annually.

Despite the impact and success brought by CDBG, there are not enough resources in the program to address all the needs of our communities and regions. While overall funding for the program has stabilized in the past few years, its funding level in 2021 is still almost \$1 billion less than it was in 2004. As you may know, if the program’s original allocation of \$2.4 billion in 1975 was adjusted for inflation, the CDBG program would be receiving over \$10 billion today.

I know this committee is not responsible for annual appropriations, but we believe restoring, and increasing CDBG from that high-water mark should be a priority for Congress.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the role that regions play in administering the CDBG program in our communities.