

**Statement of Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09)**  
**Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies**  
**5/13/2021**

---

Thank you, Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart, for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to testify on Fiscal Year 2022 priorities.

Today, I will share several priorities before the Subcommittee that would make a tremendous impact on my district, including investments in community and housing restoration, improvements to facilities to care for people experiencing homelessness, and federal commitments to make our streets safer for pedestrians and motorists. These community projects are crucial investments in Memphis, and I look forward to working with this Subcommittee to help make my district a more equitable and restorative place to live.

First, I am requesting funding for the Historic Melrose Redevelopment Project, would be used to invest in the Orange Mound community -- the first African American neighborhood, in the history of America, to be built by and for African Americans – and the redevelopment of the Historic Melrose High School. This project will provide housing for seniors and will create a place for nonprofits to convene and offer numerous community services. It will also include space for a genealogy center and a library, which is an ideal location considering the former school and neighborhood's rich history. This project is part of Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland's \$200 million "Accelerate Memphis: Invest in Neighborhoods" plan, which also provides for making catalytic neighborhood investments. This restoration project is needed because it will provide a centrally located library within the neighborhood of nearly 9,000 residents. Of the residents, 99% are African American, 35.8% are below poverty level and 64.2% of residents are at or above poverty level. Nearly half of the population receive food stamps/snap (49.7%). The median household income is \$18,004. (Source: ACS 2014-2018). As a low-income area, it will

fill important needs for employers to connect with residents, job seekers and consumers; and play a crucial “think-tank” role for small businesses, entrepreneurs, training programs to acquire the skills and support needed to financially prosper. The redevelopment of Historic Melrose would breath life back into one of Memphis’ most storied districts. Orange Mound is one of the most culturally rich communities in the country, and it is vitally important to capture that history for future generations. The redevelopment is envisioned to be a place where generations of students, visitors and residents will gain knowledge and wisdom to change Memphis and the world.

Second, I am requesting funding to transform the Collins Chapel Connectional Hospital into a homeless shelter. The facility has a rich history as formerly being an African American Hospital that served the needs of African American citizens of Memphis and the surrounding areas when they could not be served at the other hospitals in the city due to segregation. This new Recuperative Care Center will be the first homeless provider to address the needs of medically fragile unsheltered people discharged from area medical facilities. Without this center, many homeless people will be discharged back to the streets with various physical ailments that could easily be resolved with basic care, including regular nutritious meals, restroom and shower facilities, staff to monitor medication and case management to ensure a pathway to permanent housing. Many studies exist to confirm what we know – that most homeless individuals return quickly to ERs with complications. This places a burden on those medical facilities as well as the entire system as most continue to be uninsured. This recuperative care center will change lives and is a model for others in the Midsouth.

Third, I am requesting funding for a new commercial kitchen and two new food-truck parking bays for Phase 2 of Memphis's Hospitality Hub (the Hub). The Hub sees 2,500 men, women, and children each year as the region's central point of entry into the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC). The first phase was a day plaza designed as a low barrier point of engagement for individuals experiencing homelessness. It opened earlier in 2020 and served as the community's primary engagement point and response mechanism for individuals experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.

Fourth, I am requesting an additional \$1 million of funding for the Memphis Home Repair Program. Recently, Memphis engaged the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to develop and launch a hybrid home repair program that aids low-income homeowners. With the additional \$1 million, the LISC will provide a grant component to the program for very low-income seniors. The grants can be used to pursue code compliance, address health and safety concerns like lead piping, façade improvements, and other needed repairs. Unfortunately, the current formula for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program does not favor Memphis compared to other peer cities with similar poverty rates. Given the significant need and the current formula, additional federal support is required.

In addition to requesting funding to supplement CDBG shortfalls, I am also requesting that HUD be directed to reanalyze the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formulas. CDBG provides billions in federal block aid assistance but has not been reviewed since 2005 and leaves many communities overlooked. For instance, one formula requires a community to have housing predating the 1940's; however, needy communities mostly demolished their pre-1940's housing, while well-off communities renovated their housing. Additionally, requirements to demonstrate growth lag since 1960 don't reflect community need.

Most communities built in the 1960s are likely not to grow due to intentional development restrictions, a lack of available land, or a decrease in household size. As a result, these communities will likely experience low or slightly declining growth compared to the national average. These requirements leave many at-need communities left behind, and therefore must be reexamined.

Lastly, I am requesting that the Subcommittee include report language reaffirming its support for improving safety through Complete Streets principles. Complete Streets refers to roads and streets designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders across a broad spectrum of ages and abilities. Along with fostering economic development and carbon-neutral transportation, Complete Streets also addresses a rising safety crisis with a disproportionate impact in Black, brown, and low-income communities. Between 2010 and 2019, pedestrian fatalities increased by 45%. In that same timeframe, Black people were struck and killed by drivers at an 82% higher rate than white, non-Hispanic Americans, and that number climbs to 221% for American Indian and Alaska Native people. The new language will incentivize the construction of Complete Streets, which will save lives, improve health, equity, and the economy, as well as help respond to the climate crisis.

Thank you, Chairman Price, and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart, for the opportunity to discuss these critical matters for my district. I look forward to working with you on delivering a more just and equitable society for all.