

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing
and Urban Development, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Collins and Ranking Member Reed:

As Congress considers the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies appropriations, we strongly urge the Subcommittee to maintain the federal government's commitment to community development at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and support \$200 million in funding for the Choice Neighborhoods program, which is the same amount requested by the President's Budget.

The Choice Neighborhoods program funds the transformation, rehabilitation, and replacement of distressed public and HUD-assisted housing and supports communities working to revitalize neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Building on the successes of the HOPE VI program, the Choice Neighborhoods program incorporates an innovative, holistic approach that leverages private resources to address affordable housing needs and community challenges that often surround troubled housing developments. It places a strong emphasis on local community planning for access to high-quality educational opportunities, including early childhood education.

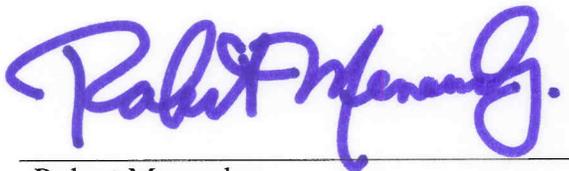
Research suggests that, for children, growing up in high-poverty neighborhoods is a stronger predictor of downward economic mobility than parental occupation, education, labor force participation, and other family characteristics combined. As a comprehensive approach to serving both people and neighborhoods, the Choice Neighborhoods program holds great promise as a way to improve economic opportunity, reduce concentrated poverty, and revitalize distressed communities. The program's targeting of local community planning and implementation generates a ripple effect, attracting new private investment to the revived communities. For fiscal years 2010-2015, the program leveraged outside investment at a more than seven to one ratio, bringing in an additional \$3.69 billion. The requested funding for FY 2017 would allow the Department to fund five to ten Planning and Action Grants, to be allocated through a competitive process, and six Implementation Grants.

Due to the program's successes in transforming distressed areas in communities across the nation, the demand for Choice Neighborhoods funding is significant. According to the Urban Institute, for every 100 extremely low income renters, only 28 units of affordable housing are available, a dramatic shortfall at a time when the demand for rental housing is at record highs.

Furthermore, continued cuts to public housing and project-based rental assistance units have contributed to what is now a backlog of \$26 billion in needed capital improvements for some of the country's oldest housing units. Despite numerous examples of successful Choice Neighborhoods partnerships that have helped to transform communities, investment in rebuilding our nation's most physically and economically deteriorated neighborhoods is barely enough to cover even a fraction of the need. This demand demonstrates the wisdom of Choice Neighborhoods' approach in giving localities a tool to deal with distressed housing developments.

We recognize that this year's budget decisions are difficult. However, the continuation of this modest but far-reaching program will have both short- and long-term benefits in revitalizing and transforming distressed housing and communities. Thank you for your consideration of this request and your support for community development and neighborhood revitalization.

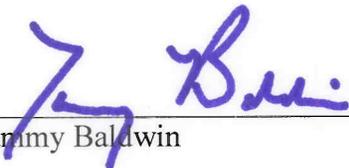
Sincerely,



Robert Menendez



Sherrod Brown



Tammy Baldwin



Richard J. Durbin



Bernard Sanders



Sheldon Whitehouse



Cory A. Booker



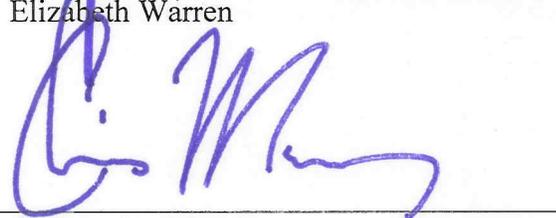
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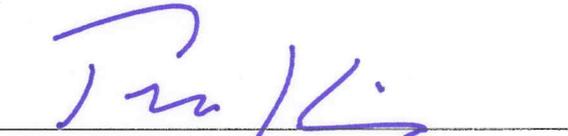

Richard Blumenthal

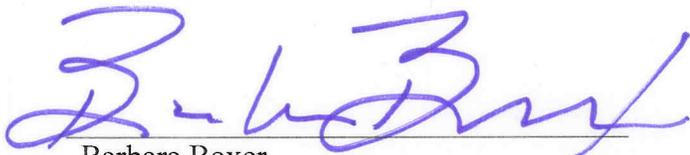

Gary C. Peters


Elizabeth Warren

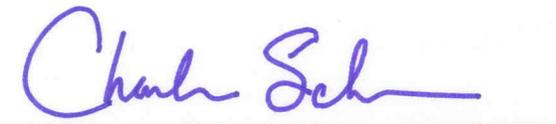

Dianne Feinstein


Christopher Murphy


Tim Kaine


Barbara Boxer


Debbie Stabenow


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