



June 3, 2015

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## **OPPOSE FY 2016 TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS BILL**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong opposition to the funding levels set out in the Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill (H.R. 2577). The House proposal underfunds key infrastructure investments, cuts spending for vulnerable populations, and includes troubling ideological riders. We urge you and your colleagues to reject it.

**The Leadership Conference opposes the bill because of significant concerns including major cuts to transit and key infrastructure investments, as well as disinvestment in funding for programs that target ending homelessness and provide housing assistance for vulnerable families. All of these cuts come at a time when our nation must address the critical issues that were recently highlighted in Baltimore and other cities—jobs, housing, transportation, and education.**

**Our top-line concerns with the FY 2016 THUD appropriations bill are outlined below:**

### **TRANSPORTATION**

- **National Infrastructure Investment Program:** The House appropriations bill eviscerates funding for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants, also known as the National Infrastructure Investment Program, which provides grants to state and local governments to improve our nation's transportation infrastructure. The bill allocates only \$100 million for TIGER grants for FY 2016. This is only one-fifth of the FY 2015 funding level of \$500 million, and nowhere near the President's budget request of \$1.25 billion. Since their creation in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, they have proven to be an incredibly popular program that receives far more funding applications than there is funding available. TIGER grants are awarded on a competitive basis according to the impact they will have on the nation, a metropolitan area, or region; and they support many of the most transformative highway, port, and transit projects in our country. They also help state and local governments leverage public and private dollars in an environment where funding for critical transportation infrastructure funding is scarce.
- **Transit:** The Leadership Conference believes access to transportation is a civil right and that full funding for transit is imperative in order to ensure that low-income and vulnerable communities have access to jobs, housing, grocery stores, and childcare, among other needs. It is therefore troubling that the House THUD Appropriations bill cuts \$3 million from the FY 2015 funding level for the Federal Transit Authority, and provides almost \$11.5 million less than the President's budget request. H.R. 2577 also underfunds support for locally

planned, implemented, and operated transit capital investments, also called “new starts,” by 41 percent. That is \$1.3 billion less than the President’s budget request. Our federal government should support well-planned, locally based and locally developed transportation solutions that will help our communities provide the transportation needs their regions require in order to connect people to jobs and to revitalize local economies.

- **Federal Highway Administration:** The Leadership Conference believes that long term funding for the Highway Trust Fund is essential for all communities in order to fix America’s infrastructure and provide our local and state governments with the ability to plan for the long term. Because Congress once again failed to pass long-term funding for the Highway Trust Fund, the House Appropriations Committee was forced to recommend appropriations for the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) without authorization. The recommendations in THUD for the FHA are therefore contingent on reauthorization of the Highway Trust Fund. This is not an appropriate way to govern, and we are dismayed that this situation continues unabated year after year. Congress must find a long-term funding mechanism(s) for the Highway Trust Fund this year.

## **HOUSING**

Only one in four families that are eligible for housing assistance actually receives it, in part because of limited funds allocated for such programs by Congress. The provisions in H.R. 2577 will only make it that much harder for hardworking Americans to access housing for their families. We are especially concerned about the following provisions of the bill:

- **National Housing Trust Fund:** Leadership Conference communities are in desperate need of a path to affordable housing. President George W. Bush signed the National Housing Trust Fund into law as part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. The Housing Trust Fund provides communities with the funds to build and maintain rental homes for extremely low-income families. While contributions to this fund were suspended at the onset of the national housing crisis, the Federal Housing Finance Agency has carefully determined that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are in a position to begin funding this vital program through a tiny share of their profits. We are dismayed that HR. 2577 would strip the funds currently allocated to the Housing Trust Fund, and prohibit any funding in the future, making it harder for millions of Americans to obtain affordable housing – not in order to reduce the deficit, but in order to fulfill some longstanding ideological vendetta.
- **Amendment Blocking Fair Housing Regulations:** During last year’s consideration of the THUD appropriations bill, the House agreed to an amendment that would block HUD’s upcoming “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” (AFFH) rule, and we anticipate a similar effort this year. Under the Fair Housing Act of 1968, HUD is required to administer its programs in a way that affirmatively furthers fair housing, and this duty extends to local governments that benefit under various grant programs. HUD’s proposed rule would make vital improvements in how the AFFH requirements are implemented. Any amendment to block HUD from implementing this rule would fly in the face of our nation’s efforts to expand opportunity and fairness for all. The proposed regulation provides helpful guidance to cities and counties on how to comply with existing obligations, ultimately making the process easier and less expensive. It does not impose any new obligations; rather, it provides more detail on the options that localities have for living up to the commitment that they’ve already made if they have obtained federal



assistance. Ultimately, the AFFH rules help ensure that everybody has an equal chance to live in strong, diverse neighborhoods with good schools and the other resources people need to thrive.

- **Housing Assistance:** H.R. 2577 provides insufficient funding to renew existing project-based and tenant-based rental assistance, a lifeline for many low-income families. The bill slashes funding for programs that invest in public housing in order to revitalize communities and transform areas of concentrated poverty.
- **Housing Choice Vouchers:** H.R. 2577 provides 6 percent less than the President's request for this assistance to the nation's most vulnerable families and individuals. Including the vouchers eliminated as a result of the budget sequester, the bill would provide roughly 100,000 fewer vouchers than the administration requested. These cuts will make it significantly harder to provide housing to vulnerable families.
- **Homeless Assistance Grants:** H.R. 2577 cuts this program by \$295 million, or 12 percent, which will deprive 15,000 homeless families of rehousing and result in 25,500 fewer units of permanent housing for the chronically homeless.

For these reasons, we oppose the funding allocations set out by the FY 2016 THUD appropriations bill and urge you to oppose it. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee, Senior Counsel at (202) 466-3648.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson  
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President