

**Chairman Susan M. Collins Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies**

**Subcommittee Markup of the FY2018 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill**

July 25, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

The Subcommittee will come to order. Today, we will mark up the fiscal year 2018 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

I have worked closely with the Ranking Member, Senator Reed, in drafting this bipartisan bill, which also includes input from all Members on the Subcommittee, from both sides of the aisle. This bipartisan bill is the product of considerable negotiation and compromise, and makes the necessary investments in our nation's infrastructure, helps to meet the housing needs of the most vulnerable among us, and provides funding for economic development projects that create jobs in our communities.

The allocation for the fiscal year 2018 Transportation and Housing Appropriations bill is \$60 billion, which is \$2.4 billion above the current funding levels. Much of this increase is to maintain our nation's aviation system and to fund rental assistance programs for vulnerable individuals and families. I want to highlight that rental housing assistance consumes more than half of our allocation and is 84 percent of HUD's budget.

The bill does not include proposals in the President's budget that would have eliminated or made drastic reductions in some of the most effective programs supported by virtually all the Subcommittee members. These programs include TIGER, the Essential Air Service program, the F.A.A., the Community Development Block Grant, and the HOME program. Rather than cutting these successful and popular programs, the bill achieves more than \$800 million in programmatic reductions and eliminations while continuing to fund the critical infrastructure, housing, and community development programs.

The bill increases funding for the TIGER grant program to \$550 million given the poor condition of our nation's infrastructure and the strong demand from local communities. Last year, 585 applicants from all 50 states and territories requested nearly \$9.3 billion in assistance, demonstrating the need for and popularity of this program. Only 40 of these applications could be funded.

For aviation, the bill does not include the Administration's proposal to privatize the air traffic control system, which appears to be a solution in search of a problem. The bill provides \$16.7 billion for the operations, facilities and equipment, airport grants, and research for the F.A.A. The Committee includes new flexibilities to ensure that Congressional inaction does not threaten or delay efforts to build on the current modernization of our air traffic control system.

To support our nation's transportation infrastructure, the bill fully funds the highway, transit, and safety programs authorized by the FAST Act and funded through the Highway Trust Fund. This includes nearly \$45 billion for the Federal-aid highway programs, of which \$900 million is for the competitive freight program that has been renamed as INFRA grants by this Administration. The bill also provides opportunities for airports to make much-needed capacity improvements. Sufficient funding is also provided for all existing New Starts transit projects as well as those expected to sign grant agreements in fiscal year 2018.

I am pleased to announce the bill provides \$50 million for a new multi-mission training vessel for state maritime academies, which will be critical for future U.S. mariners. The oldest training vessel is now 56 years old, and by providing the first installment of funds to replace these vessels, we will help ensure the future success of our maritime workforce.

Turning to HUD, in addition to including sufficient funding to renew exiting rental assistance, the bill continues to provide \$3 billion for the Community Development Block Grant program and \$950 million for HOME. These programs support the development of affordable housing and infrastructure and other projects, which lead to economic development and job creation.

Senator Reed and I share a strong commitment to reducing and ending homelessness and therefore provide \$2.46 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants. We continue to focus on the issue of youth homelessness, and strengthen these efforts by providing \$55 million. In addition, \$20 million is provided for new vouchers for youth exiting the foster care system.

For our nation's homeless veterans, the bill provides \$45 million, including \$5 million to serve our Native American veterans living on tribal lands. We have made tremendous success in reducing veterans' homelessness, which has decreased by 47 percent since 2010.

The bill increases funding for lead abatement grants by \$15 million above current levels in an effort to accelerate the progress being made in eliminating hazardous exposure to lead, which can have such a detrimental impact on young children. Eliminating lead-paint based hazards has been a priority for Senator Reed and me since we first came to the Senate.

These are highlights of some of the programs included in the bill. We will face many challenges before this bill becomes law, but I am committed to advancing this bill.

I want to thank my staff and Senator Reed's staff for their hard work in drafting this bipartisan bill. I also want to thank the members of this Subcommittee who have provided valuable input, as is reflected in the bill before us today. I urge my colleagues to support the T-HUD bill today and on Thursday in the full Committee.

In keeping with the tradition of the Subcommittee, I would ask members to refrain from offering amendments until the full Committee markup on Thursday, but Senator Reed and I would appreciate knowing of any such amendments as soon as possible so that we may begin working with our colleagues.

With that, I turn to Senator Reed for his remarks.

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