



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

February 19, 2020

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation-HUD
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation-HUD
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Price
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation-HUD
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation-HUD
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Collins and Price and Ranking Members Reed and Diaz-Balart:

I write on behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center's housing and infrastructure projects to highlight several of our priorities for the fiscal year 2021 appropriations bills. Our initiatives, led by diverse political, business, and other thought leaders, negotiate and develop consensus-driven, bipartisan recommendations.

Notably, BPC's [Executive Council on Infrastructure](#) previously issued a series of recommendations on how to ensure the efficient use of limited federal infrastructure dollars and attract private capital to public infrastructure. As you determine how best to allocate limited funding, we encourage you to consider their proposals to:

Promote more efficient and cost effective project delivery and asset management. The infrastructure crisis we face today stems from a collective and chronic failure to adequately fund, manage, and operate critical infrastructure assets, including roads, bridges, transit systems, water utilities, and other systems. Spreading best practices in project delivery and asset management could change all that, generate savings, and lead to better infrastructure projects. As such, we encourage you to consider requiring applicants of federal infrastructure funding and financing to:

- Conduct comprehensive [asset inventories](#),
- Fully account for project [life-cycle costs](#) (including assessments of the costs and risks inherent in construction, operations, and maintenance), and
- Analyze all potential project delivery options to assess which offers the best value for taxpayers (including projects over a certain dollar threshold be screened for possible P3 delivery).

The burden of any new requirements could be mitigated, particularly for smaller communities, by providing funding for [technical assistance](#) and streamlining other [regulatory burdens](#).

Strengthen infrastructure financing programs. The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program and its water equivalent WIFIA offer favorable interest rates with deferred repayment and flexibility that can be essential to getting infrastructure projects off the ground. Strong

support for these programs would allow state and local governments to finance more projects and pursue innovative project delivery options that can be otherwise challenging to finance, including bundled rural projects and public-private partnerships. Moreover, the administration should be directed to review TIFIA and WIFIA credit scoring and align risk-weighting with actual loan experience. This change could allow both programs to support more infrastructure without additional budget authority

Provide planning grants and technical assistance. BPC's Infrastructure Council [conducted an analysis](#) of the unique challenges faced by rural communities as they attempt to upgrade and modernize their infrastructure assets. One of their biggest challenges we identified was a lack of staff resources to assess, plan, budget for, and manage infrastructure assets. As such, we encourage you to consider providing planning grants and technical assistance to ensure that state and local leaders have the capacity to develop new projects and navigate often cumbersome federal application processes. Moreover, all communities must do a better job of assessing and mitigating their exposure to hazard-related risks, including flood risks and vulnerabilities to increasingly extreme weather and climate change. While new programs, guidance, and more will be needed on that front, you could consider boosting providing additional funds for adaptation planning, capacity, and technical assistance.

Build up agency capacity to improve the NEPA review and permitting process. There is a long history of bipartisan support for technical changes to the federal environmental review and permitting process, including the creation of the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Committee in the FAST Act. However, such policy changes can only be successful if the FPISC and federal agencies have the resources needed to advertise new and available streamlining procedures; institutionalize best practices that make processes more timely, transparent, predictable, and efficient; and offer staff training and support.

Over the years, BPC has also led several initiatives focused on expanding access to safe, affordable, and healthy housing, including our [Housing Commission](#), [Senior Health and Housing Task Force](#), and other [staff-led efforts](#). As you determine how best to allocate limited funding, we encourage you to consider their proposals to:

Robustly support evidence-based housing assistance programs. With one in four renters in the United States spending more than half of their income on rent, homelessness rates and housing insecurity are rising in many communities. Since rents generally increase each year, appropriations for affordable housing and other community development programs must also increase annually just to renew existing contracts. With growing evidence that decent, stable affordable housing can serve as a platform for achieving better life outcomes—including improved school performance, diminished health problems, and a reduction in psychological stress—there is a compelling case to commit new spending to rental housing assistance. For example, in 2017, [BPC noted](#) that an investment of around \$8.5 billion annually could:

- Increase the supply of affordable rental homes by as much as 400,000 units;
- Reduce homelessness among families and chronic homelessness to *de minimis* levels; and
- Provide mobility counseling and targeted housing vouchers for more than 500,000 additional low-income families (including 1.2 million children), promoting more equitable access to high-opportunity neighborhoods and improved life outcomes.

Encourage additional HUD and HHS collaboration. Among the most important public health findings over the last two decades has been that there are a number of factors, beyond medical care, that influence health and contribute to premature mortality. BPC has worked extensively to highlight the

importance of one such factor—safe, affordable housing—recognizing that the integration of health and housing has the potential to improve health outcomes and reduce costs borne by the health care system. There are many ongoing and productive partnerships between HUD and HHS at this nexus of health and housing. Generally, these collaborations help the departments break down their siloed decision-making, more fully capitalize on their respective expertise, maximize limited funding, and more efficiently and impactfully fulfill both their missions. Yet their work is far from finished. BPC has [published a list of collaborative opportunities](#) Congress could consider encouraging the departments to pursue.

Help older adults age in their homes and communities. Falls are the leading cause of injuries and injury-related deaths for those 65 and older, resulting in nearly 30,000 deaths, 3 million emergency department visits, and over 800,000 hospitalizations annually. Total medical costs for falls are more than \$50 billion annually, of which the Medicare program accounts for \$31 billion. However, as indicated in BPC's report [Healthy Aging Begins at Home](#), most falls are preventable through implementation of home modifications, clinical interventions, and community-based programs. In 2019, Congress created Aging-in-Place Home Modification grants, designed to enable low-income older adults to remain in their homes through low-cost, high-impact home modifications. While HUD is still in the process of designing the home modification grant program and intends to incorporate promising falls prevention practices into the program design, additional funding and oversight are needed.

Thank you for your important work and please let us know how we can be helpful.

Sincerely,

Andy Winkler
Associate Director, Housing & Infrastructure
Bipartisan Policy Center