



September XX, 2009

Dear Senator,

We write you as representatives of the affordable housing, sustainable, and equitable development communities to urge you to consider signing on as a cosponsor of the Livable Community Act of 2009, S.1619, introduced by Senator Christopher Dodd. This bill would authorize the creation of a new office at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to coordinate federal policies that foster sustainable development and administer HUD’s sustainability initiatives, and would also provide \$4 billion to assist local governments in planning better and more affordable places where people can live.

A growing number of communities are looking for ways to support integrated regional planning efforts. While the need for affordable housing has received well-deserved attention through HUD, creating a systematic way to support a renewed focus on “affordable living” would take into account the combined burden of transportation and housing costs. For many working households, the goal of affordable living is becoming less attainable as fuel prices and trip lengths increase. We feel this legislation will help support local communities in urban, suburban and rural regions to provide more affordable choices for all Americans.

These grants will help communities of all sizes that are looking for innovative ways to create and preserve affordable housing, support transit-oriented development, improve public transportation, create walkable main streets, and foster economic and community development. The first grants would help communities develop comprehensive regional plans that incorporate transportation, housing, community and economic development and environmental needs. The majority of the funding, \$3.75 billion over three years, would fund a challenge grant program to implement projects identified in these comprehensive plans.

In addition to funding needs, many communities face regulatory challenges when trying to use existing federal programs to support affordable, sustainable communities. Because the bill also works to promote and implement interagency cooperation between the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and HUD on these issues, programs like New Starts grants for major transit capital investments and the Community Development Block Grant program could more efficiently assist communities in planning for and coordinating housing and transportation investments.

Senator Dodd’s Livable Communities Act represents an enormous opportunity for Congress to help millions of Americans and their families live more affordably, and sets the stage for true cooperation and collaboration between federal agencies that will have a real impact on how effectively our communities can plan for the future. We urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mayor John Robert Smith
President and CEO
Reconnecting America

Judith Bell
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