



April 29, 2010

Honorable Chris Dodd, Chairman  
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Development  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Dodd:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 1619, the Livable Communities Act and for all your hard work surrounding this legislation.

Affordable living, which takes into account the combined burden of transportation and housing costs, is becoming less attainable for many working households, as fuel prices and trip lengths increase. In addition to supporting local communities in urban, suburban and rural regions to provide more affordable choices for all Americans, the Livable Communities Act addresses employer interests in housing for a competitive workforce – near jobs and near transit. We need more tools like this to promote sustainable communities that provide a range of housing options accessible to jobs and transit.

The Livable Communities Act will be most effective if it engages private-sector partners, so we urge you to incorporate the attached language in the manager's amendment during markup in committee.

Employer-Assisted Housing (EAH) describes a variety of housing benefits that employers can offer their employees, such as homebuyer assistance, rental assistance, homebuyer education and counseling, and assistance for new construction and renovation of housing. EAH programs help workers live closer to job and transit centers; help employers attract and retain employees; and help build strong communities.

On an individual basis, EAH programs improve employees' quality of life while also benefitting the employer by boosting recruitment and retention. EAH partnerships have been demonstrated to be a safe way of introducing working households to homeownership and gaining access to better and more affordable housing.

On a larger scale, these programs promote the goals of the Livable Communities Act by helping employees live closer to work, reducing lengthy commutes and related pollution, linking workers to their communities, and building strong communities by leveraging private-sector partnerships.

For example, in Illinois, a state that has taken leadership by offering matching funds and tax credits to spur EAH programs, a public investment of \$2.3 million has leveraged more than \$8 million from employers – and resulted in approximately \$400 million in home sales since 2000. More than 3,500 employees in Illinois have received free homeownership counseling through EAH programs, and approximately 2,000 have bought homes with their employer's assistance.

The Livable Communities Act represents an enormous opportunity for Congress to help families, municipalities and businesses. It 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 and invest in the future. Once again, we urge you to incorporate the attached language in the manager's amendment during markup in committee.

Sincerely yours,

Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, Inc.

Dan Hoffman, EAH Consultant, EAHousing.com

Century Housing

Enterprise Community Partners

HEART of San Mateo County

Housing California

Housing Trust Fund of Santa Barbara

Housing Trust Fund of Santa Clara County

Long Island Housing Partnership, Inc.

Los Angeles Business Council

Mammoth Lakes Housing

Metropolitan Planning Council

National Association of Realtors

National Housing Conference

REACH California Network

Reconnecting America

Rural Enterprises of Oklahoma, Inc

Select Milwaukee

The Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development, Inc

Here is the relevant text of the Livable Communities Act. Changes are highlighted below.

### **Section 3 (Purpose)**

(3) to encourage regional planning for livable communities and the adoption of sustainable development techniques, including transit-oriented development and employer-assisted housing programs;

(7) to promote economic development and competitiveness by connecting the housing and employment locations of workers, reducing traffic congestion, and providing families with access to essential services;

### **Section 4 (definitions)**

Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) is an employer-provided benefit that helps employees with their housing needs.

### **Section 7 (Comprehensive Planning Grant Program)**

(d) Application (2)(D) a certification that the eligible entity has created, or will create not later than 1 year after the date of the grant award, a regional advisory board to provide input and feedback on the development of the comprehensive regional plan that includes, as appropriate, representatives of a State, the metropolitan planning organization, the rural planning organization, the regional council, public transportation agencies, public housing agencies, economic development authorities, other local governments, environmental agencies, public health agencies, the nonprofit community, the private sector, local employers, community-based organizations, citizen groups, neighborhood groups, and members of the public;

(f) Eligible Activities (D) the creation and preservation of workforce housing and affordable housing for low-, very low-, and extremely low-income families, including housing with access to jobs and public transportation;

### **Section 8 (Sustainability Challenge Grant)**

→ (e) (selection)– The applicant demonstrates the ability to leverage additional funding [or assistance as defined by the Secretary] from employers, consortia of employers, or unions for housing

→ (f) (grant activities):

(2) PROJECTS AND INVESTMENTS-

An eligible entity that receives a grant under the grant program shall carry out 1 or more projects that--

(B) promote livable communities through investment in--

(iv) promotion of employer-based commuter and housing benefit programs to increase public transportation ridership and location efficiency;