

July 19, 2010

The Honorable Dick Durbin
U.S. Senate
230 S. Dearborn St., Ste. 3892
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Senator Durbin:

As America travels the arduous path to economic recovery, our communities need tools and incentives to rebuild in environmentally and fiscally sustainable ways. One such tool is the federal Livable Communities Act of 2009 (S.1619/H.R. 4690), sponsored by Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Colo.). The Metropolitan Planning Council, a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy advocate in the Chicago region, joins its peers around the nation in urging you to sign on as a co-sponsor.

The Livable Communities Act promotes sustainable communities that provide a range of housing options accessible to jobs and transit. It would create a new office within the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to coordinate federal policies that foster sustainable development. It also would help local governments invest more efficiently in affordable places where people can live, work and play.

Affordable living – which takes into account the combined burden of transportation and housing costs -- is becoming less attainable for many working households. This legislation addresses employer interest in housing near jobs and near transit, to yield a more a competitive workforce.

Specifically, the Livable Communities Act calls for challenge grants to help communities plan, create and preserve affordable and workforce housing, as well as transit-oriented development to improve public transportation, create walkable streets, and foster economic and community development. The bill legislates interagency cooperation between the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and HUD, which means programs such as transit New Starts and Community Development Block Grants will more efficiently assist communities in planning and coordinating housing and transportation investments.

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However, this legislation will be most effective if it engages private-sector partners. As such, we ask you to endorse amended language that will encourage:

- Employer-assisted housing (EAH) programs.
- Employer participation in planning and investment.
- Investments for housing leveraged from employers or unions.

EAH – through which employers provide a variety of benefits to their employees, such as financial assistance to buy or rent, homebuyer education and counseling, or even building and renovating properties – are proven to help people live near their jobs and public transportation, and reduce their top two household expenses, housing and transportation.

The Livable Communities Act represents an enormous opportunity for Congress to help families, municipalities and businesses. It sets the stage for unprecedented cooperation and collaboration between federal agencies that will have a real and lasting impact on how our communities can plan for and invest in the future. Please support this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MarySue Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MarySue Barrett
President
Metropolitan Planning Council