

March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Co-Chair Johnson, Co-Chair Gomberg,  
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Transportation and Economic Development.

Dear Friends,

I am Rev. Michael Ellick, Senior Minister at First Congregational Church in Portland Oregon. As the leader of a faith community located in Downtown Portland's South Park Blocks, I am quite familiar with homeless issues here in town, due in part to the large number of people living right outside our front doors who I am pleased to serve, and to the members of my own congregation who have recently been forced out of their homes and into their cars (or tents) due to increasingly unaffordable housing costs in our city. Something must be done. As economic forces continue to shape our city and our state into a place that is increasingly inhospitable – and even hostile - to working class people, we are now in a state of crisis. We have reached a critical turning point in the history of our time here on this land, and it is now up to all people of faith in the common good to recognize what is happening to us, and then to do something about it.

Our own faith tradition tells us that being a community means far more than just living in close proximity. It means living justly and fairly with all our neighbors, recognizing that in truth we are all interdependent, that we are bound to each other and to our planet both by biology and by spirit, and that whatever happens to one of us inevitably effects all of us. Because of this, a sacred task has fallen to this committee. The \$50 million dollar allocation for an Emergency Housing Account and State Homeless Assistance Program will not by itself solve the problem we are raising here today, but it is a step in the right direction. Funding streams like the EHA not only have a proven track record of success in keeping families in their homes and helping them find new housing, the State Homeless Assistance Program offers critical assistance to emergency shelters like the one we started in our own chapel for homeless veterans last year.

I sincerely hope the allocation of such funds is as obvious to you as it is to me. But if it isn't, I invite anyone here to spend a day with me in Portland to meet some of the kinds of people I spend time with regularly. I have no doubt that such time would quickly clarify the issue for you, and illustrate the great urgency needed in creating housing opportunities for all Oregonians. I implore you, as people of conscience, to reach down beneath whatever erroneous concerns or distractions which might prevent such a decision, and to recognize the clear moral need for this request. At stake is what kind of people we will continue to be, and whether Oregon will simply be the geographic boundaries for a jumble of people living in close proximity, or a true reflection of the Beloved Community that I know each of us yearns for.

Thank you,

Rev. Michael Ellick  
Senior Minister  
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Portland