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January 6, 2009

Mr. Shaun Donovan
Commissioner
New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10038

Dear Mr. Donovan:

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), representing a nationwide network of public urban research universities, extends to you our sincere congratulations upon your nomination as the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. We applaud your work with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development and your commitment to improving urban communities.

USU is a network of public urban research universities that represents every region of our country. University presidents created USU to leverage the intellectual capital and economic power of urban universities, thereby improving urban life and America's competitiveness in the global economy. To this end, USU is focused on three major issues -- creating a competitive workforce, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population.

During this economic crisis, public urban research universities stand ready and able to play an important role in producing economic stability for our nation's cities and metropolitan areas. These universities are economic drivers and create the jobs, growth, and revenues on which urban areas and our country depend.

As anchors for our nation's cities, public urban research universities are directly involved in partnerships and outreach with our communities. USU campuses provide technical assistance and support to local and regional businesses and development organizations. Through our work these groups build their capacities to pursue economic development projects and activities. In addition, our universities engage in housing and community development assistance, such as rehabilitating neighborhood homes and abandoned properties; providing loans to local residents and organizations to purchase

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homes and start-up companies; and constructing public facilities for recreational purposes.

In the coming year, USU will undertake an aggressive housing and community development legislative agenda, which is attached. This agenda reflects USU's mission that calls upon public urban research universities to escalate urban university engagement and to do so with the clarity of purpose that has characterized large-scale efforts within higher education in the past. It also complements the new administration's priority to create a White House Office of Urban Policy to develop a strategy for metropolitan America. The cornerstone of this agenda is to build upon the successful Community Outreach Partnerships Centers program and expand opportunities for public urban research universities, such as establishing an Urban Grant University program (modeled after the Land, Sea, Space, and Sun Grant programs) at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Again, USU greatly appreciates your vision and leadership on urban housing and community development issues. We look forward to working with you, by offering our policy ideas and access to our many experts, in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Zimpher
Chair, Coalition of Urban Serving Universities
President, University of Cincinnati

Attachment

Cc: Bruce Katz, Department of Housing and Urban Development Review Team Lead



USU Housing and Community Development Agenda for the 111th Congress

Our nation's cities play an important role in America's national prosperity, driving innovation and economic growth by employing many highly-skilled workers and containing clusters of related firms and industries. However, urban areas face many challenges unique to cities. Their secondary schools experience a higher drop-out rate than the national average and their elementary and secondary students typically score below state and national averages on performance exams. Urban schools often encounter teacher shortages in high-need subject areas such as mathematics and science. Particular neighborhoods are stricken with poverty and struggle to attract businesses and services. Health disparities are pervasive in urban settings, and result in part, from an insufficient and ethnically imbalanced health workforce in cities.

As anchors for our nation's cities, public urban research universities are uniquely positioned with a broad range of skills and resources – intellectual, human, technological, and social – to engage in these urban challenges. They are an essential part of the education pipeline, enrolling large numbers of students from local school districts and specifically training them to be educators in urban areas. Public urban research universities are economic drivers, as they serve as prominent employers, real estate developers, and business incubators in their cities. These institutions are utilizing their capacity to produce an urban health workforce, conduct interdisciplinary research, provide clinical resources, and organize community-academic partnerships on chronic diseases and health disparities. Public urban research universities often act as conveners of the various stakeholder groups from their local communities as well as the greater metropolitan areas. Community engagement by public urban research universities not only provides a valuable service to the cities, but also enables these institutions to improve their own core knowledge and expertise that leads to further theories, discoveries, and advances for our nation.

The Coalition of the Urban Serving Universities' (USU) housing and community development agenda for the 111th Congress recommends the following:

- Create a competitive grant program to encourage institutions of higher education to create and sustain a campus-wide infrastructure and culture around working with and strengthening their local neighborhoods and communities.
- Establish early career research rewards, modeled after the National Science Foundation's program, at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- Designate urban universities as leaders in community engagement that are eligible for special federal funds, similar to the successful Land, Space, Sea, and Sun Grant programs.
- Create a housing and urban development grant assistance program that encourages universities to provide technical and financial assistance to non-profit organizations to undertake community development and affordable housing projects.
- Reauthorize and fund the Community Outreach Partnerships Centers program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Funding should be set to at least its FY 2005 level of \$6.5 million.