

December 3, 2009

Barbara Poppe
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness
409 Third Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Ms. Poppe:

The Homeless Advocates Group would like to welcome you to your new position with the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH). The group is very pleased to have someone with your level of knowledge and experience in restructuring service and housing systems to more effectively serve consumers as the ICH Director. The Homeless Advocates Group is composed of a diverse set of national organizations representing housing, service, health care, and human rights interests of people and families who are homeless.

As you know, the economic downturn and foreclosure crisis are driving dramatic increases in homelessness across the country. A strong, effective, well-resourced national plan to end homelessness is especially critical at this time. The Homeless Advocates' Group has developed recommendations in six priority areas that we believe will contribute to an effective plan to end homelessness, increase the Council's impact for homeless people, and promote the basic human rights of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

1. Commit to End Homelessness Now, with Public Participation

- Participation: As you develop the plan to end homelessness required by the HEARTH Act, engage advocates, local communities with successful programs, and people who have experienced homelessness in all parts of your planning process. The attached list includes member organizations that can provide guidance on a range of topics and special population issues as well connect ICH to people who have experienced homelessness.
- Coordination: Coordinate with national groups, organizations, and federal agencies, including the White House Rental Housing Task Force and HUD's strategic planning process to ensure that housing for the lowest income people is at the forefront of those planning and implementation bodies. While addressing homelessness is within HUD's strategic goals, it should be listed as a stand-alone goal in order to garner the resources and attention necessary to end homelessness. Similarly, HHS and all other federal agencies should include policies to end homelessness in their planning. Forming cross agency task forces around particular special population or subject areas will also provide concentrated attention from multiple agencies and advocate groups.
- Public Attention: Launch the plan at a White House Conference in Spring 2010 in order to elevate the priority of ending homelessness both within the administration and for the American public.

- Accountability: Make the plan accountable by providing implementation oversight from the ICH staff and public progress reports.

2. Increase Access to Affordable Housing

- Vouchers: As Section 8 vouchers are a key tool to providing flexible housing resources for homeless persons that have not been increased since 2002, ICH should press for an increase of a minimum of 200,000 vouchers annually. It is also imperative to prevent attrition and rent payment standard changes and support reforms to improve cost modeling to avoid further shortfalls that endanger existing tenancies and reduce opportunity for new households to access vouchers.
- Supportive Housing: Provide a minimum of 90,000 permanent supportive housing units that combine rental assistance with services to establish and maintain tenancies of homeless persons with the greatest needs.
- Production: Increase the number of new affordable units produced for extremely low income households by capitalizing the National Housing Trust Fund at \$10 billion over two years and funding the Trust at \$1 billion annually.
- Prevention: Fund a strong homeless prevention system, continuing both Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) and McKinney-Vento prevention and rapid re-housing programs and funding at higher levels to match demonstrated need. Additionally, provide 80,000 veteran households at risk of homelessness with short-term financial assistance and services to stabilize their current tenancies and avoid accessing emergency shelter; support current legislation that would fund prevention initiatives. Strengthen implementation of the housing protections created under the Violence Against Women Act, through strong HUD guidance and oversight, to prevent survivors of domestic violence from becoming homeless and to more fully address the housing needs of this population. Increase outreach and implementation of the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act, to protect tenants in foreclosed properties from homelessness.
- Special Populations: Increase funding for special population programs that will end homelessness by financing the housing programs of Violence Against Women Act at \$60 million, doubling the Transitional Living Program under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and boosting Family Unification Program vouchers to 19,000 annually. Add 30,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers per year and 40,000 new units of permanent supportive housing for veterans who are homeless or at risk by supporting enactment and full funding of the Homes for Heroes Act, and 10,000 vouchers for veterans with minimal supportive service needs.
- Federal property resources: Encourage the use of federal property, including military bases, as housing for homeless people that could be paired with supportive services. The two federal programs that currently allow this should be expanded to include additional properties.

3. Expand Access to Affordable Health Services

- Reform: Ensure health care reform legislation guarantees access to high quality, affordable, and comprehensive health services, including behavioral health services, for all low-income individuals.
- Medicaid: As part of this reform, expand Medicaid to all low income people and expand reimbursement services to include supportive services in housing and medical respite care to support better health outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness and reduce frequent utilization and costs associated with emergency room and inpatient hospital care.

4. Ensure Adequate Incomes

- Increase incomes through employment training and placement and/or raising levels of public assistance provided to ensure households have adequate incomes to secure housing that is affordable at 30 percent of household income.
- Remove barriers that now prevent many eligible homeless people from receiving benefits through the Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income programs.

5. Ensure Access to Childhood Education

- Strengthen educational access for homeless children and youth including unaccompanied youth, through the reauthorization and fully funding of the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act and increased oversight of its implementation; increased access to and funding of Head Start; and increased access to higher education.

6. Protect Against Discrimination

- Criminalization: Discourage local ordinances that criminalize homelessness including public use restrictions targeting people who are homeless through education targeted to public officials and the general public.
- Alternatives: Develop and promote constructive alternatives to criminalization of homeless persons' use of public places and facilities including supporting housing first, substance abuse treatment, and health and mental health care as a primary tool in navigating public use issues.
- Voting: Ensure homeless persons' rights to vote and develop plan to increase voting access for homeless persons.

The Homeless Advocates Group is eager to work with you and the members of the Council to develop a national plan to end homelessness that will impact local communities and provide housing resources to those most in need of assistance. We hope the Council will agree to our recommendation to create cross agency task forces, and that our organizations will be invited to sit on or work with them. To assist with and encourage this process, we are enclosing with this letter a list of issue areas and subpopulations that we feel

should be addressed by the plan, as well as a list of contact people within our organizations with relevant expertise.

We would appreciate meeting with you at your earliest convenience to further discuss these priorities, your plans for the ICH and how we can be involved with the ICH's important work going forward. For follow up, please contact Maria Foscarinis, mfoscarinis@nlchp.org, or Jason Small, jsmall@nlchp.org, both at 202.638.2535. Sincerely,

Beyond Shelter
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County
Family Promise
Give Us Your Poor
National Aids Housing Coalition
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for The Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Center on Family Homelessness
National Center for Housing and Child Welfare
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Health Care for The Homeless Council
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Network 4 Youth
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
Social Action Linking Together
Washington Coalition for the Homeless