

March 16, 2010

NCH Public Policy Recommendations **Access to Workforce Services**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that the workforce services system is designed to more effectively and efficiently serve people experiencing homelessness.

U.S. Representatives – Request leadership of the House Committee on Education and Labor to make amendments to the Workforce Investment Act to better assist people experiencing homelessness.

U.S. Senators – Request leadership of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions to make amendments to the Workforce Investment Act reauthorization bill to better assist people experiencing homelessness.

ISSUE STATUS

Twelve organizations concerned about homelessness, including the National Coalition for the Homeless, have issued a set of recommendations for improving the public workforce investment system. The organizations urged Congress and the Administration to advance them through reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.

The organizations note that the public workforce investment system was established to help all Americans prepare for employment and re-enter the workforce. Some publicly funded programs do reach people who are homeless, but serious impediments limit this population's access to workforce programs. A key barrier is the current emphasis on providing "core" services at the expense of "enhanced" services and vocational training. Training and intensive services are essential to many persons experiencing homelessness who seek to join the workforce. Admittedly, many of these individuals offer a constellation of challenges that exceed those presented by the majority who use the workforce system. Far from receiving incentives to meet these needs, however, workforce authorities are neither rewarded for serving people who experience homelessness nor encouraged to do so. Moreover, workforce system planners and practitioners lack the information, resources and support they need to implement evidence-based workforce development practices that have proven successful with homeless populations.

Recommendations being offered by the homelessness organizations include:

- Require workforce authorities' plans to address the needs of persons who are homeless. Require workforce authorities to report the housing status of those served.
- Authorize homeless navigators at one stop centers.
- Enable unaccompanied homeless youth to access workforce services.
- Authorize the development of appropriate performance and outcome measures.
- Offer homeless workforce system development grants.
- Create a national center to support workforce development for the homeless.
- Increase funding for essential services.

The national homelessness organizations invite endorsements of the recommendations document from additional national, state, and local organizations. To view the recommendations, please

visit, http://nationalhomeless.org/advocacy/WIA_ReAuth-0709.pdf. To add your organization name to the recommendations, please send a request to be added to cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- While almost half (44%) of homeless people work at least part time, their monthly income averages only \$367, compared to a median monthly income of \$2,840 for U.S. households.
- Many people in extreme poverty unable to work due to health conditions or other factors. For those that are able to work, impediments include lack of assistance in finding jobs, shortage of jobs that pay well enough to afford housing and other life necessities, and lack of skills necessary for available jobs.
- The workforce services system is not funded adequately, despite the promise in 1998 that it would serve all American job seekers through access to basic job search services and occupational skills training. From 2002 to 2008, funding for the WIA Adult program shrank by 10.2 percent.
- Stringent targets and performance measurements set by state workforce agencies and the U.S. Department of Labor discourage WIA-funded providers from serving job seekers with multiple barriers to employment, often including people experiencing homelessness.
- Certain provisions of WIA hinder the ability of the homeless population to receive appropriate job training services from WIA-funded service providers. Absent specific training and technical assistance, the network of “qualified providers” is unlikely to include enough providers with expertise in meeting the needs of hard-to-serve populations.

BACKGROUND

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was enacted to replace the Job Training Partnership Act and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act with a new workforce services system. WIA services—including job search and placement assistance, labor market information, employment counseling, and occupational and basic skills training—are provided primarily through One-Stop Career Centers.

Unfortunately, the transition to WIA has not benefited job seekers with multiple, significant barriers to employment. Homeless workers’ limited skills and education levels usually consign them to, at best, temporary employment at very low wages. In the service of creating more permanent housing, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) decreased its funding of employment assistance through local homeless Continuums of Care. At the same time, the workforce system decreased its funding of training and intensive services for hard-to-serve populations in order to better serve those who would most likely get employment with the least amount of assistance.

The Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP), administered by the Department of Labor’s Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), has proven successful in helping job seekers in finding meaningful employment, but its services are restricted to homeless veterans rather than the entire homeless population. However, HVRP provides evidence of the effectiveness of workforce investment strategies targeted to the homeless population.

For further information on the public policy recommendations of the National Coalition for the Homeless, contact the NCH public policy staff at info@nationalhomeless.org or 202.462.4822, or visit www.nationalhomeless.org.