

January 22, 2010

## National Coalition for the Homeless

The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) is a national network of people who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, activists and advocates, community-based and faith-based service providers, and others committed to a single mission. That mission, our common bond, is to end homelessness. We are committed to creating the systemic and attitudinal changes necessary to prevent and end homelessness. At the same time, we work to meet the immediate needs of people who are currently experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of doing so. We take as our first principle of practice that people who are currently experiencing homelessness or have formerly experienced homelessness must be actively involved in all of our work. The National Coalition for the Homeless engages in public education, policy advocacy, and grassroots organizing. We focus our work in the areas of housing justice, economic justice, health care justice, and civil rights. Founded in 1982, NCH is the oldest national organization advocating with persons experiencing homelessness.

### Summary of 2010 Public Policy Recommendations

#### BRING AMERICA HOME

**Bring America Home Act:** The Bring America Home Act (BAHA) is the signature public policy element of NCH's campaign to prevent and end homelessness. BAHA, a comprehensive bill first introduced in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, includes provisions in the areas of housing security, income security, health security, and civil rights. NCH has strengthened the bill's content since its development and is preparing for its reintroduction this Congress.

**Federal Homelessness Plan:** Federal law requires the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to develop a federal plan to end homelessness. NCH advocates for the plan to articulate specific action steps and resource commitments to Bring America Home. NCH seeks to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are involved with preparing the plan.

#### HOUSING JUSTICE

**National Housing Trust Fund:** For every 100 extremely low income renter households, there are only 37 affordable rental homes. This means that more than 60 percent of these households constantly struggle to find permanent affordable housing. Congress has established a permanent National Housing Trust Fund to increase and preserve the supply of rental housing for this population. NCH urges Congress to immediately fund the NHTF.

**Permanent Affordable Housing Programs:** The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program assists very low-income families and elderly and disabled individuals in obtaining affordable housing on the private market. Section 8 has prevented countless low-income families and individuals from falling into homelessness. At a time when affordable housing in the private market is scarce and the foreclosure crisis is pushing the number of people experiencing homelessness even higher, NCH supports increased appropriations into the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program sufficient to add two million more vouchers into the housing assistance system. NCH supports the Section Eight Voucher Reform Act. NCH supports increased appropriations for CDBG, HOME, Section 202, Section 811, HOPWA and rural permanent housing assistance programs.

**Foreclosure and Homelessness Prevention:** NCH's June 2009 report, "Foreclosure to Homelessness: The Forgotten Victims of the Subprime Crisis," reported that a majority of local and state homeless coalitions had seen an increase in homelessness since the foreclosure crisis began in 2007. NCH monitors the implementation of the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act, two new homelessness prevention tools enacted by Congress in response to the impact of the foreclosure crisis on homelessness.

**HUD McKinney-Vento Programs:** The McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs administered by HUD make funds available for provisions of emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing, and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness. The HEARTH Act of 2009 increases the funding level for HUD McKinney-Vento programs and modifies the programs. NCH participates in the administrative process to develop regulations to implement the HEARTH Act. In addition, NCH seeks an increase in appropriation levels for HUD McKinney-Vento programs in fiscal year 2011.

**Rural Homeless Assistance:** Rural homelessness is an epidemic afflicting thousands of individuals and families every year, but rural communities often face a dearth of homeless assistance services. The current formula and method for distributing funding through HUD homeless assistance programs puts rural communities at a disadvantage. The Rural Homeless Assistance Act, a legislative proposal of NCH, would create a rural homeless assistance program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NCH seeks introduction of its proposed Rural Homeless Assistance Act. NCH also seeks to contribute to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study into rural homelessness authorized in the HEARTH Act.

## HEALTH CARE JUSTICE

**Universal Health Care:** The lack of access to quality, affordable health care is a contributing factor to homelessness in that it forces uninsured or underinsured people to choose between medical care and housing. Homeless people suffer from multiple health problems at a rate far higher than the general U.S. population, yet 55 percent have no medical insurance. NCH urges Congress and the Administration to guarantee access and eliminate all financial barriers to comprehensive health services for all Americans, preferably through a single payer system.

**Health Care Safety Net Programs:** Homelessness presents serious barriers to primary care and treatment of behavioral health conditions. People experiencing homelessness present complex challenges for which most mainstream providers are ill-equipped or untrained. The Homeless Access to Recovery through Treatment (HART) Act (H.R. 4129 in the 110th Congress) strengthens substance abuse and mental health services and extends their reach to persons experiencing homelessness by improving mainstream and targeted homeless programs of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). NCH urges reintroduction of the HART Act in the 111th Congress. NCH supports increased appropriations in FY 2011 for SAMHSA homeless programs and for the Health Care for the Homeless Program.

## ECONOMIC JUSTICE

**Universal Livable Income:** Approximately 44 percent of the adult homeless population has performed some type of work for pay in any given month, yet most do not make enough to afford housing. Many more homeless persons may be unable to work due to disabling conditions, and are eligible for disability benefits under the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) programs, but not currently enrolled. The payment levels under SSI are insufficient for obtaining affordable housing. NCH urges Congress and the Administration to ensure that every American has an annual income—whether through wages, public income assistance, tax credits, or a combination thereof—sufficient to obtain and maintain permanent housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the household's income.

**Workforce Services:** The public workforce investment system was established to help all Americans prepare for employment and re-enter the workforce. While some publicly funded programs do reach people who are homeless, serious impediments limit this population's access to the mainstream workforce system. NCH urges Congress to remove barriers to workforce services for homeless and other hard-to-employ people during reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.

## CIVIL RIGHTS

**Prevention of Hate Crimes Against Homeless People:** Since its first annual report on the subject in 1999, NCH has documented over 800 unprovoked violent attacks against homeless people, with over 200 of those attacks resulting in death. In many cases, the attackers have never met the victims, and they don't benefit materially from the attacks; they are motivated only by a dehumanizing bias against homeless persons. Such attacks deserve to be called what they are: hate crimes. The Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act (S. 1765/H.R. 3419) would direct the FBI to gather data on potential hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness. NCH urges Congress to pass the Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act.

**De-criminalization of Homelessness:** In some state and local jurisdictions, people experiencing homelessness experience or are at risk of citations, fines, and arrests for their conduct of survival acts (such as loitering or sleeping in public) that have been determined illegal. The federal government could play a constructive role in discouraging such "criminalization of homelessness." NCH urges Congress to require jurisdictions receiving HUD McKinney-Vento program funds to certify they are not criminalizing homelessness through laws and ordinances. Further, NCH urges Congress to penalize jurisdictions criminalizing homelessness by sanctioning Byrne Justice Memorial Grant funds.

*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](mailto:info@nationalhomeless.org) or 202.462.4822, or visit us at [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org).*