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**This is the July issue of *NCH News*.**

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## **NCH Statement on Enactment of the HEARTH Act**



The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) issued the following statement upon enactment of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH Act). The legislation, which



reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, was included within the larger Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 (S. 896, P.L. 111-022).

President Obama signed the legislation on May 20, 2009.

The National Coalition for the Homeless commends Congress for taking action to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. This action represents the first formal reauthorization of HUD's homeless assistance programs since 1992 – a reauthorization long overdue. Moreover, the wide margin of support for the addition of the HEARTH Act to the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 is indicative of the bipartisan interest among Members of Congress in responding to homelessness. NCH congratulates U.S. Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Christopher “Kit” Bond (R-MO), former Senator Wayne Allard (R-CO), U.S. Representatives Gwen Moore (D-WI), Judy Biggert (R-IL), and Geoff Davis (R-KY), the late U.S. Representative Julia Carson (D-IN) and other Members of Congress who played leadership roles in assuring reauthorization of HUD homeless assistance programs.

From NCH's perspective, the enacted version of the HEARTH Act is a mix of favorable and disappointing provisions. Among the provisions of the HEARTH Amendment that enjoy NCH support:

- Adds additional homelessness prevention activities and populations at risk of homelessness into the current Emergency Shelter Grants program, which is renamed Emergency Solutions Grants.
- Allows Congress to finance the renewal costs of permanent housing projects initiated with HUD McKinney-Vento funds from the Housing Choice Voucher account.
- Increases the administrative expense limit for project sponsors.
- Prohibits shelter and housing projects receiving HUD McKinney-Vento funds from requiring a family to separate any child or youth member of the family from the whole unit as a condition for the family's admission into the shelter or housing.
- Improves collaboration between Continuum of Care jurisdictions and HUD-funded homeless assistance providers and local educational agencies with regard to homeless child and youth access to elementary and secondary education.
- Requires the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on rural homeless assistance, including offering recommendations on the appropriate federal agency or agencies to administer a rural homeless assistance program.

In other areas, the legislation falls short of NCH's aspirations. Among them:

- The authorization level for HUD McKinney-Vento programs is set at \$2.2 billion in FY 2010, far below the minimum \$3 billion level of annual funding need identified by NCH and other homeless advocacy organizations, particularly as homelessness prevention activities are introduced as eligible activities into HUD McKinney-Vento programs.
- The bill relegates homeless people and service providers to consultative roles in the Continuum of Care application process, rather than assuring them decision-making roles.

- The new definition of homeless individual for HUD programs (and by extension other federal, state and local programs that use the HUD definition of homelessness) continues to exclude several subpopulations recognized in other federal law to be homeless, including homeless families living in shared housing for more than two week duration and single adults and childless couples living in shared housing due to loss of housing and economic hardship. Furthermore, the new definition is overly complex and likely to prove unwieldy for people to understand whether or not they are eligible for homeless assistance, or why they may be eligible for some homeless programs, but not others.
- The bill permits jurisdictions with low rates of homelessness to use Continuum of Care funds for people who are not homeless under the HUD definition but are homeless under other federal definitions, but limits this flexibility for jurisdictions with higher rates of homelessness, thus creating inequity in access to HUD-funded homeless assistance services across jurisdictions.
- The legislation limits flexibility of jurisdictions receiving Continuum of Care funds to spend resources on the full range of eligible activities by establishing priorities, incentives, and bonuses for some activities over others.
- The legislation limits flexibility of jurisdictions receiving Emergency Solutions Grant (formerly Emergency Shelter Grant) funds to spend the full amount of ESG resources on emergency shelter, outreach, and essential services.
- The bill codifies into law the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) without assuring privacy protections for homeless people or controlling use of HMIS data for decision-making.
- The bill misses the opportunity to elevate the Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness to a Senate-confirmed position, or to have the ICH Director report directly to the White House rather than to an annual rotation of Cabinet secretaries.
- The bill's definition of "rural area" for purposes of a new rural homeless assistance set-aside program permits metropolitan cities within some western states to remove themselves from the main Continuum of Care program and instead secure funds through the rural account.

NCH regrets that the above-mentioned weaknesses in the legislation were not adequately addressed in the HEARTH Act prior to passage. However, we will work with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and other stakeholders to assure implementation of the HEARTH Act in a manner as inclusive and protective as possible as the law affords for people experiencing homelessness and for homeless assistance service providers. The brief two-year authorization period for HUD McKinney-Vento programs provides a quick opportunity to ask Congress to redress weaknesses with the new law.

NCH thanks the many individuals and organizations who over this past decade educated us about the challenges in addressing homelessness in their lives and in their communities, who helped us shape our policy recommendations for HUD homeless assistance reauthorization, and who responded to our repeated calls for action.

We urge individuals and organizations who encounter barriers to accessing HUD homeless assistance programs as a result of the new law to report those concerns to their Members of Congress. Please also report them to NCH so that we may attempt to rectify challenges through HUD policy, regulation, or Congressional action. Please forward your concerns to NCH at [info@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:info@nationalhomeless.org).

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## **New Staff and Interns Join NCH Team**

We are pleased to welcome the newest members of NCH's team.

Charles Bontrager of the Mennonite Voluntary Service will be replacing Adam Gaedert as our Policy Advocate. Charles graduated from Goshen College, where he majored in Bible, Religion and Philosophy. He was attracted to NCH because of our focus on addressing the root causes of homelessness as well as the immediate needs of those experiencing it. He hopes to learn more about these root causes during his tenure. Charles enjoys reading, relaxing with friends, and playing Ultimate Frisbee in his spare time. Eventually, he would like to enter seminary.

Joining us as interns are Kiara Boon, Eliza Horn, John McGrail, Rebecca Sturgis and Lauren Tatro.

Kiara comes to NCH from Davidson College, where she majors in political science. Kiara became interested in doing something about homelessness after hearing the stories of those experiencing it in Charlotte, NC, through the Urban Ministry Center there. Kiara will be researching the criminalization of homelessness. After college, Kiara hopes to enroll in a joint JD/MBA program. She is also considering taking part in the Teach for America program. Kiara likes to read, take walks, and try new things.

Eliza attends Vanderbilt University, where she majors in both Law and Social Justice and Creative Writing. Eliza had previously worked in providing direct services for people experiencing homelessness. She was motivated to come to NCH out an interest in the policy side of the problem. Eliza will be devoting her time at NCH to lobbying and policy work. She plans on a future in public interest law, and in her free time enjoys reading, writing, art, baking and Thai food.

John is a student of economics and Russian at Amherst College. He hopes to gain experience in fighting against the spread of homelessness and in helping those currently in need. He hasn't decided what he would like to do after graduating, but he is considering the Peace Corps. John likes to play basketball, and runs for the Amherst cross-country and track teams.

Rebecca majors in Health: Science, Society & Policy at Brandeis University. She will be researching the major causes of death among people experiencing homelessness and drafting policy recommendations on how these might be addressed. Rebecca wants to pursue a career in public health, and likes to spend her free time with friends and family.

Lauren is a political science major at College of the Holy Cross. She decided to intern at NCH after talking with a previous intern about her positive experience. She will be researching hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness, as well as wages for workers nationwide. Lauren hopes to gain more insight into the day-to-day experiences of people experiencing homelessness. She enjoys swimming, running, novels and travel.

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## **Faces of Homelessness Soon to Be Everywhere**

**By Cheryl DeFlavis**

"I brought a homeless friend, Ben, with me to a Rotary Club in 1979. I planned to let him eat my free meal while I spoke. We both got free meals. And when I got up to speak, I invited Ben to join me. I spoke for a bit and then Ben told his story. Ben held the audience at rapt attention. The audience seemed more interested in Ben than me. He got asked more questions. Henceforth, I always took at least one homeless friend with me whenever I went to meetings, lobbying visits, speaking engagements, etc." It was a risky thing to do, but Michael Stoops, now Director of the National Coalition for

the Homeless (NCH), did it anyway. The idea for a speakers' bureau comprised of homeless and formerly homeless speakers was born from that risk.

Since then, NCH's "Faces of Homelessness" Speakers' Bureau based in Washington, DC, has grown from an idea to a movement. The Bureau currently has 26 speakers whose stories and experiences reached over 17,000 individuals from 40 states across the U.S. in 2008 alone. The face of homelessness are often surprising to those who hear the stories of the speakers and audience members usually vow to never treat homeless individuals poorly again. "The Speakers' Bureau is a powerful educational tool in the fight to end homelessness. I have witnessed more than a few audience members fight back tears as they listened to speakers share their personal stories. The presentations move many people to action in their own communities", explained Dana F. Woolfolk, one of the speakers from the National Coalition's Bureau.

In 2007, NCH partnered with AmeriCorps\*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) to put VISTA volunteers at local coalitions and service providers across the state of Florida to create speakers' bureaus. They focused on using Florida as a starting place for the project because the state had the highest number of violent attacks against homeless individuals for the past three years in a row. These bureaus are modeled after "Faces of Homelessness" and reach out to the same audience as NCH: youth, civic groups, all faith groups and college students. The 11 VISTAs and one VISTA Leader in nine cities across the state share the same commitment to dispelling the myths, stereotypes, and misperceptions people with homes have about those without homes. David, a speaker from the Orlando Speakers' Bureau said, "We get looked at as the enemy, there might be some bad people on the streets but there are people in suits and ties doing worse every day." As of April 2009, the VISTAs have recruited 95 speakers across Florida who are taking the chance to advocate on behalf of themselves and others who are in similar situations. In the past six months the speakers reached 15,273 people; 7,701 adults and 7,572 youth.

The National Coalition for the Homeless hopes to nationally expand the Speakers' Bureau project and is currently taking steps toward that goal. By June 2009 there will be 25 VISTAs and two VISTA Leaders in 16 cities across Florida; 10 VISTAs and one VISTA Leader pioneering the project in all major cities across Georgia; and three VISTAs located in major cities in South Carolina. The projects in Georgia and South Carolina will closely mirror the project in Florida by utilizing VISTAs at various homeless service agencies and coalitions. NCH hopes to hire two staff people to help manage the rapidly expanding project; a Trainer to teach the VISTAs best practices and other methods for creating successful, sustainable Speakers' Bureaus at their site, and a Program Director/ Administrator to manage the project in Florida.

The stories of homelessness in newspapers, blogs, and television news demonstrate the need for dialogue between homeless and housed individuals to work toward solutions to end homelessness. Who better to advocate for increased resources to help homeless men, women and children and educate communities on the need for treating our homeless neighbors with dignity and respect than those who have experienced it? As one of the Florida Speakers, Steve Z., from the Homeless Coalition of Palm Beach County Storytellers said, "I have a Masters Degree in [homelessness]. If there is one thing I know it would be that."

If you are interested in hosting any of the Speakers Bureaus check out NCH's website at [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org).

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## Blogging about Homelessness



After the last few years, blogging has taken the media world



by storm, spawning blogs on seemingly every conceivable topic. Homelessness is no exception. Here are some of the blogs we've noticed:

[Alice and Key](#): A simulation of the experience of a homeless family utilizing the computer game The Sims 3.

[The Homeless Guy](#): Perhaps the longest-running blog of a person experiencing homelessness.

[LA's Homeless Blog](#): "An inside perspective on homelessness" from Joel John Roberts, CEO of the nonprofit

social services organization PATH Partners.

[Invisible People](#): A video blog striving to "make the invisible visible."

NCH News readers are invited to send us their own blog recommendations.

## NCH on the Road

Where to Catch the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau:

Wednesday, July 1st: University of Maryland, 7:15 p.m.  
 Wednesday, July 1st: John Hopkins University, 7 p.m.  
 Monday, July 6th: The Pilgrimage (Washington, DC), 7 p.m.  
 Tuesday, July 7th: The Pilgrimage, 3:30 p.m.  
 Wednesday, July 8th: University of Maryland, 7:15 p.m.  
 Sunday, July 12th: Fairfax Baptist Church, 8:30 p.m.  
 Monday, July 13th: The Pilgrimage, 2:00 p.m.  
 Monday, July 13th: The Pilgrimage, 3:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday, July 14th: Sheraton National Premiere Hotel, 7:30 p.m.  
 Monday, July 20th: The Pilgrimage, 7:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday, July 21st: Tysons Westpark Hotel, 7:30 p.m.  
 Tuesday, July 21st: Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church, 7:30 p.m.  
 Monday, July 27th: The Pilgrimage, 2:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday, July 28th: Sheraton National Premiere, 7:30 p.m.

## What It's Like to Be Homeless

By David Lanier, *Benton County Daily Record*

You can call them hoboes. You can call them paupers. You can call them ill-fated campers. But it's wrong to call them homeless. They're houseless. Their home may be a tent. Or a cardboard box. Or the back seat of an automobile. But to them, that's their sleeping arrangements: That's home. What causes houselessness? According to sociologist Nels Anderson, a homeless person is "a destitute man, woman or youth, either a resident or a transient, who is without a domicile at enumeration voluntary or involuntary." Due to a myriad of dire circumstances, houseless individuals fall through the cracks of fortune and end up without a domicile. "The difference between a homeless person is that they've lost their support system," concluded Jon Woodward, executive director of Seven Hills Homeless Shelter in Fayetteville. "Most people rely on family members or friends to help them out when adversity strikes."

Kenneth Kusmer, author of "Down and Out, On the Road, the Homeless in American

History," surmised, "Destitute people living in the streets and in homeless shelters are not so different from the rest of us. They never have been."

Likewise, George Orwell purposely lived in lodging that housed the less fortunate to try to understand what causes homelessness.

In his scholarly tome "Down and Out in London and Paris," Orwell wrote, "I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels, nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy, nor subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn my clothes, nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant."

Read more [here](#).

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## Thank You from NCH

We would like to thank the following contributors for their generous support during the month of May:

Ronald Cavaluzzi  
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Rosemary Palfy  
Tanya Peete  
Edward James Sass  
Norman Taylor  
Teresa Torres

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## Public Policy Updates

### HUD McKinney-Vento Reauthorization

On May 20, President Obama signed into law the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, legislation reauthorizing HUD's McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs, as part of the larger Helping Families Save Their Homes Act (S. 896). The National Coalition for the Homeless commends Congress and the President for taking this long-overdue action, the first formal reauthorization of HUD's homeless assistance programs since 1992.

Moreover, the wide margin of support for the addition of the HEARTH Act to S. 896 is indicative of the bipartisan interest among members of Congress in responding to homelessness.



While NCH supports and applauds many provisions in the HEARTH Act, the signed legislation unfortunately falls short of our aspirations in a number of ways. Among NCH's concerns that the legislation failed to address were a restrictive and cumbersome definition of homelessness, weak assurances of consumer and provider participation in the decision-making process, restrictions on eligible activities, and insufficient privacy protections of consumer data. To read a full statement from NCH on passage of the HEARTH Act, please visit this link on our website: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/advocacy/HEARTHActStatement52609.pdf>. A full summary and analysis of the signed HEARTH Act is also available at this site: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/advocacy/HMV%20Side-by-Side.pdf>.

NCH looks forward to working with HUD to address some of these concerns in the implementation process. To do so, NCH will be convening workgroups consisting of people experiencing homelessness, advocates, and service providers across the country who have particular interest or concerns about the following aspects of the HEARTH Act:

1. Definition of Homelessness
2. Consumer and Provider Participation in Decision-Making Process
3. Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)
4. Rural Homeless Assistance

If you are interested in participating in one or more of these four workgroups, please e-mail Charles Bontrager, NCH Policy Advocate, at [cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org), indicating your name, your e-mail address, your title and organization (if applicable), and which workgroup(s) you would like to join. These workgroups will meet periodically by conference call beginning in early Fall; in the meantime, NCH will be able to provide you with important updates and information regarding HEARTH Act implementation.

#### Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure

NCH is proud to report that on May 20 President Obama signed into law the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009 as part of the larger measure S. 896. This legislation provides much-needed protections for low-income renters whose homes are undergoing foreclosure. The new law requires that the new owners of a property after foreclosure notify the tenants at least 90 days before requiring them to vacate. In addition, a tenant with a lease is now legally permitted to remain in the property until the end of the lease, unless the purchaser will occupy the property as a primary residence, in which case the tenant would still receive 90 days notice. The legislation also provides that a Section 8 voucher-assisted tenant may remain in place for the term of the lease and requires the initial purchaser at foreclosure to assume the Section 8 housing assistance payment contract. Finally, states with stronger statutes already in place will continue to stand.

NCH congratulates all lawmakers and low-income housing advocates who fought to pass this measure protecting low-income renters, often the most innocent victims of the foreclosure crisis. For more information about the new law, please see the links on this website: <http://www.nlihc.org/template/page.cfm?id=227>.

#### Homeless Veterans Legislation

The Homes for Heroes Act (H.R. 403), a bill to provide additional housing assistance for very low-income veterans, passed the House of Representatives on June 16 by a vote of 417-2. NCH and others are very hopeful that the Senate will soon follow suit by



passing its companion bill, S. 1160, introduced by Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) on June 1. NCH supports this legislation, and commends members of the House of Representatives for once again taking this important step to ensure that America's veterans do not have to return home and sleep on the street or in emergency shelter.

### Demolition of Public Housing

On June 15, Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), Chairperson of the House Financial Services Committee, and Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, sent a letter to HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan calling for a national one-year moratorium on the demolition of public housing. The letter emphasizes the important role public housing plays in communities and for families, and laments that only a portion of the 120,000 public housing units demolished in the last 10 years have been replaced. Finally, the letter highlights the need for a national policy requiring one-for-one replacement of demolished housing units. Noting that the net loss of public housing units has certainly caused many low-income families and individuals to become homeless, NCH commends Representatives Frank and Waters for this effort, and encourages HUD to heed their recommendation.

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## Celebrate Your Birthday with NCH: Use Facebook Causes

Is your birthday this month? Are you looking for ways that you can involve your friends and family in issues close to your heart?

Facebook Causes is giving you a new way to celebrate your birthday and give back!

Simply send a message to your friends asking them to give a donation to your favorite cause in celebration of your birthday this year! Let them know why homelessness is an important issue to you and why you want them to support the work of the National Coalition for the Homeless!

Click [here](#) to customize your birthday wish.

This year, NCH has noted it's 27th year of working to end homelessness.

Our goal is to raise \$1,000 for each year we have been advocating on behalf of those experiencing homelessness.

Click here to set up your own Birthday cause!

The Government has recently given Recovery funding to rapid re-housing and other emergency services! But it is still not addressing the root causes of homelessness: Lack of Affordable Housing, Lack of Adequate Health Care and Poor Paying Jobs (minimum wage is not a living wage!).

We want to wish you a very Happy Birthday this June! We hope you take advantage of this unique way to help NCH fight to rectify the root causes of homelessness and Bring America Home!

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## Quarterly Policy Call June 8

The National Coalition for the Homeless is pleased to announce the third installment in

its series of Quarterly Public Policy Calls. The call will take place on Wednesday, July 8, at 4 p.m. ET. The call-in number is 866-740-1260, and the conference ID is 9119873. If you plan to participate, please RSVP to Charles Bontrager, NCH Policy Advocate, at [cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org).

As with previous calls, this hour-long session will be both informational and interactive. NCH will update participants on current public policy developments pertaining to homelessness. More importantly, we will use the call to gather feedback and answer questions from the field on current topics and on NCH's public policy positions.

The primary focus of the upcoming call will be a discussion of next steps on two important pieces of legislation that were enacted into law in May 2009. The first is the HEARTH Act, legislation reauthorizing the HUD McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs; the second is the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act, legislation preventing low-income renters who live in foreclosed properties from becoming homeless. NCH staff will provide information about the content of the enacted HEARTH Act, offer opportunities for homeless advocates and service providers to join NCH's advocacy efforts in the implementation process, and solicit input from participants on the call. Finally, a guest speaker will update listeners on the new tenant protection laws and answer any clarifying questions that arise.

Any individual who wants to engage with NCH on public policy matters is invited to participate. We especially welcome people who are currently experiencing, or have formerly experienced, homelessness; staff or volunteers of state and local homeless coalitions; staff of entities responsible for developing homelessness plans or continuum of care applications; homeless assistance service providers; and state and local policymakers.

For additional information or to register to participate in the conference call, please contact Charles Bontrager at [cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:cbontrager@nationalhomeless.org).

The next call in this quarterly series will take place on October 14, 2009, at 4 p.m. Eastern Time.

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## Send NCH News Your Feedback



What do you think of this newsletter? What do you think NCH should be doing? How is the problem of homelessness being addressed in your community? How do you think it should be addressed? Do you have any stories to share?

If you have an answer to any of these questions, NCH News invites you to submit letters or articles to be considered for inclusion in future issues. Please email submissions to [swaite@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:swaite@nationalhomeless.org).

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