

NCH . NEWS . . .

NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS | 2201 P St NW | Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202.462.4822 | Fax: 202.462.4823 | INFO@NATIONALHOMELESS.ORG | WWW.NATIONALHOMELESS.ORG

NCH News - May 2009

This is the May issue of NCH News.

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Public Policy Update



Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)

The Department of Housing and Urban Development released its notice of application procedures and requirements for the \$1.5 billion Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 on March 19. The funds will be distributed through the same formula used by HUD's Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) program, and funds may be used for providing short- and medium-term financial assistance, housing relocation and stabilization services, data collection and evaluation, and administrative costs. For more information on this program, visit HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange website: http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HPRP_Notice_3-19-09.pdf. Homeless assistance providers, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness should begin immediately to provide input to state and local authorities responsible for implementing HPRP to determine how these funds will be utilized in their jurisdictions. NCH has a number of recommendations for influencing the use of these funds to benefit the lowest-income Americans in greatest need of support. Some of those recommendations were communicated in our second Quarterly Public Policy Call on April 8, and will be available shortly in a forthcoming Action Alert to be posted on our website and sent to our email distribution list.

HUD McKinney-Vento Reauthorization

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Bills to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development were introduced in both the House and the Senate on April 2. HUD McKinney-Vento programs make funds available to emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing programs, and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, and reauthorization is long overdue. However, the two bills that have been introduced—H.R. 1877 and S. 808—are nearly identical to the McKinney-Vento reauthorization bill that passed the House last year, with which NCH had a number of concerns. Among those areas of concern are the overly restrictive definition of homelessness, provisions that restrict communities' flexibility in determining how best to use federal funds, the lack of a requirement that service providers, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness be fully involved in the decision-making process, and insufficient privacy protections of client data. NCH is urging Congress to address shortcomings in the bills before bringing them to a vote.

Tenant Protections

The Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009, H.R. 1247, was referred to the House Financial Services Committee. The bill, introduced by Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), would protect renters living in foreclosed properties by requiring the purchasers of said properties to give the tenants 90 days' notice prior to eviction. The bill also provides that tenants with Housing Choice Vouchers may remain in place for the entire term of the lease. NCH and others are supportive of Rep. Ellison's efforts, and urge Congress to pass this crucial legislation to help keep innocent victims of the foreclosure crisis in their homes. An Action Alert from NCH on H.R. 1247 is forthcoming.

Joint Communication with President Obama

At a press conference on March 24, President Obama responded to a reporter's question about the steadily increasing problem of family homelessness. President Obama stressed the importance of creating jobs and then stated that homelessness is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as ours. NCH, in collaboration with other national homeless advocacy groups, responded to the President by reaffirming the six key steps to preventing and ending homelessness that were presented to him in a letter last November: Hold a White House Conference at which a federal plan to end homelessness, with specific goals and timelines, will be presented; significantly increase funding for affordable housing; ensure that incomes are sufficient to afford the basic necessities of life; ensure access to health services; ensure access to education; and guarantee protection from discrimination and violence based on homeless status. NCH urges the Administration to continue to work with homeless advocates to respond comprehensively to the growing crisis in homelessness.

Upcoming NCH Speaking Engagements

Where to catch our Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau:

April 23rd College of New Jersey
April 24th Burlington County College in Pemberton, NJ
April 25th Temple Sinai from Toronto, Canada at the Religious Action Center
April 25th Pilgrimage group from Trinity PC in VA
April 30th United Methodist Church
May 2nd Fountain of Life Church in Alexandria, VA
May 2nd YSOP in DC
May 3rd Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church—Christopher Dock Mennonite High School from PA
May 5th Etgar 36 group in DC
May 7th DC Pretrial Service Agency
May 8th DC Pretrial Service Agency Hate Crimes/Criminalization workshop
May 12th Congregation Bethel in MD (two panels)
May 14th-16th Atlanta, GA—training for new VISTA's in GA and FL

60 Minutes on The Soloist



Forthcoming film *The Soloist*, starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey, Jr., tells the story of musical prodigy Nathaniel Ayers and his struggle with homelessness and mental illness. Earlier this month, *60 Minutes* took a closer look at the true story behind the film, including interviews with Mr. Ayers and the journalist who told his story, Steve Lopez. You can view the segment [here](#).

Action Alert: Ensure that Homeless Funds Are Well-Spent

ACTION REQUESTED: The National Coalition for the Homeless urges people experiencing homelessness, homeless advocates and homeless service providers to weigh in with their state and local officials to ensure that funds from the new \$1.5 billion Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) are spent in a manner that benefits people in greatest need of assistance.

BACKGROUND: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, otherwise known as the “Recovery Act” or the “stimulus bill,” included the creation of a \$1.5 billion Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HPRP funds may be used for providing short- and medium-term financial assistance (including rent and utilities payments) and housing relocation and stabilization services for people who have lost their housing or are in danger of doing so. The funds for this program will be distributed to state and local jurisdictions using the same formula as HUD’s Emergency Shelter Grants program.

On March 19, 2009, HUD released a Notice for HPRP, including information on application procedures, eligible activities, and program requirements. Homeless assistance providers, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness should immediately provide input to state and local authorities responsible for distributing HPRP funds in their jurisdictions to determine how these funds will be utilized.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Select the “HPRP Fund Formula Allocations” link on the HUD Homelessness Resource Exchange website, <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHPRP>, to learn the amount of money the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has allocated to your jurisdiction.
- View the Notice from HUD, with information on application procedures, eligible activities, and program requirements, at this website: http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HPRP_Notice_3-19-09.pdf.
- Contact the housing authority in your jurisdiction to learn which officials are responsible for developing the state or local plan for distributing HPRP funds.
- Make recommendations to the jurisdictional authority to assure that funds are used in a manner that benefit the lowest-income people.
- NCH has identified key recommendations—listed below—that will improve implementation of the HPRP. You are welcome to advocate additional recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Accept HPRP Funds – The HPRP Notice establishes allows for grantees to decline their share of HPRP resources. NCH urges advocates to assure that their jurisdiction applies for HPRP funds if eligible.
2. Ensure public and provider participation in substantial amendment development — The Notice grants jurisdiction the option to shorten the citizen participation comment period on the “substantial amendment” to the Consolidated Housing Plan they will be preparing as a condition for receiving HPRP funds. Advocates should press their jurisdictions to utilize more generous comment periods as well as information gathering methods outside of formal citizen participation to assure the substantial amendment has community member buy-in and support.
3. Target HPRP resources to poorest Americans — The Notice permits grantees to extend HPRP to individuals and families with incomes at or below 50 percent of AMI. Advocates should urge jurisdictions to target HPRP services to individuals and families in their community with the greatest need for prevention or rapid re-housing.
4. Include persons in shared housing as eligible recipients — The Notice describes various risk factors for homelessness that jurisdictions ought to consider when determining an individual’s eligibility for homelessness prevention assistance. NCH recommends that jurisdictions include individuals and families sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, shared housing, or similar circumstance to be eligible recipients for HPRP prevention assistance.

prevention assistance.

5. Assure Permanency Planning – The Notice places a time limit of 18 months on rental assistance provided to HPRP participants. Advocates should press their jurisdictions to articulate clear processes and commitments of resources to assure transition of HPRP participants receiving rental assistance into permanent housing following the conclusion of the term of their HPRP rental assistance.

6. Assure Availability of Supportive Services — The Notice disqualifies most supportive services from eligibility for HPRP funding. Since supportive services are necessary complements to rental assistance and housing relocation or stabilization services, advocates should push their jurisdictions to identify and increase other sources of funding for supportive services targeted to HPRP recipients. For example, the Recovery Act infuses state and local workforce agencies with significant resources for employment and training services. ESG jurisdictions should describe in their HPRP substantial amendment how they plan to connect HPRP recipients to supportive services offered by workforce and other supportive services providers.

7. Service provider considerations — State and local advocates should press their jurisdictions to assure equitable geographic distribution of HPRP providers and comparability in HPRP services offered by such providers so that consumers need not “shop” for the provider with the best benefit package.

8. Supplement, rather than supplant, prevention funds — The Notice does not direct grantees to assure that they shall use HPRP resources to supplement, rather than supplant, state and local resources currently expended on homelessness prevention. Advocates need to push jurisdictions for non-supplantation commitments, regardless of the absence of federal direction.

9. Assure Effective Project Monitoring – The Notice requires grantees to monitor HPRP activities. Advocates should push jurisdictions to include in their substantial amendment a robust monitoring plan sufficient for providing evidence of the effectiveness of the HPRP.

ACTION RESOURCES: To learn more about the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, visit: <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHPRP>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Contact NCH public policy staff at info@nationalhomeless.org or 202.462.4822.

NCH Board Members Take Part in National Low Income Housing Coalition Annual Conference



During the National Low Income Housing Coalition Annual Conference (also the time of our Spring Board Meeting), NCH Board members met with HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan to discuss our concerns. From left, Fred Kamas (former NCH Director), David Pirtle (sitting), John Parvensky, Sherri Downing, Sue Watlov Phillips, Shaun Donovan, and NCH Speaker, Rico Harris.



At the NLIHC Tuesday night Awards Reception honoring Sheila Crowley and Senator Harry Reed for their work on the National Housing Trust Fund, NCH was a strong supporter of the National Housing Trust Fund. NCH Board Member Sue Watlov Phillips is pictured with HUD Secretary, Shaun Donovan.



NCH Board Member Sherri Downing with Senator Jon Tester (Montana) explaining the reason NCH does NOT support the introduced McKinney Vento reauthorization and discussing our soon to be released Foreclosure to Homeless report.

Thank You from NCH!

NCH would like to thank the following contributors for the month of March:

- Regina Downing
- Carolyn LaCivita
- Memolink, Inc.
- Margardia Jorge
- Heather Morris
- M. Caleb Neelon
- Courtney Shaw

Homeless in Tent City, USA

By Kathy Sanborn, [CounterPunch](#)



Homeless encampments around the country are mushrooming, much to the embarrassment of government officials, many of whom prefer to hear no evil, see no evil. In Fresno, California, a shantytown called “New Jack City” is host to newly poor, unemployed electricians and truck drivers, who share space with drug addicts and the mentally ill who have been homeless for years.

And, thanks to Oprah, Sacramento is famous for its homeless tent city, featuring several hundred people residing in pitched tents bordering the American River. With refuse strewn everywhere, and no potable water or bathroom facilities, this celebrated shantytown is clearly a sanitation risk.

Almost as soon as the media ran with the story, plans were made to shut down the Sacramento tent city in the foreseeable future. City officials will relocate the homeless to other, presumably more sanitary, areas (e.g., at the site of the state fairgrounds, Cal Expo). According to the Sacramento Bee, “homeless campers” will be ousted in about four weeks, as the private property will be fenced off to ban the tent city population.

California’s capital is not the only city to be brought to its knees by photos of disheveled citizens with nebulous futures. Reports of burgeoning tent cities in Nevada, Tennessee, and Washington State (just to name a few) have kept local governments hopping to fix the trouble before the media
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spotlight targets their own cities.

Read more [here](#).

BEST Workexchange Offers Workforce Development by Training the Homeless

DENVER, CO., March 23 -- The Best Workexchange Program is partnership between Denver's Road Home, Bentley Systems, Inc. HOPE worldwide Colorado, Volunteers of America, United Way, and community volunteers with engineering experience.

This pilot project was designed to create an opportunity for those less fortunate, to learn a valuable skill and perhaps a life-long career in CAD drafting and design, by providing simple CAD services to partnering companies used as paid training. Bentley has provided BEST with applications and online training on a broad scope of infrastructure design disciplines: electrical, mechanical, structural, civil, plant, etc. VOA has provided lab space.

Bentley's LEARN Server allows participants to access self-paced training and be credited with Learning Units summarized in a Bentley Transcript upon completion of each lesson or course. BEST hosts 9 CAD workstations and server with internet access. Participants enter the program and train online and self-paced until they are ready to take on the more difficult paid work.

Primary to BEST is, a unique concept based on Bentley Microstation, CAD (computer-aided design) software and Bentley ProjectWise, an Engineering Document Management System that dually provides training and supported workforce to project partners, along with employment and training opportunities for the homeless population, resulting in a fully functional, cost effective model. Because of the inherent global enterprise architecture of Bentley ProjectWise, BEST trainees can provide simple drafting and technical data services to local and global businesses from their workstations BEST lab or on laptops wherever free wireless access is available.

Companies can post the work and rely on Bentley ProjectWise notification, security, workflow and messaging to collaborate.

Rates are competitive to offshore work, and participants will enter the work force as contractors or full time employees as experience and opportunity allow. BEST aims to partner with companies, who can post non-critical drafting work by piece or in bulk to the work center.

As 95% of the architecture, engineering and construction world uses the DGN or DWG format, BEST participants are trained on a suite of Bentley Microstation based applications that will enable them the capability to produce and edit both DGN and DWG drawings. AutoCAD/AutoPlant training will be available in the future as required.

"Donated" work from participating companies includes CAD redline markups, text editing, basic drafting, scanned file redrawing, data entry, title block extraction, and word processing. Companies can post a work package to the BEST hosted Bentley ProjectWise Server as the central repository. Many plant design or Oil/Gas owner-operators and EPC's require tag based data-to-document associations for hundreds or even thousands of drawings, but limited budget. BEST offers an affordable alternative solution that keeps work from being outsourced overseas.

Suzanne Baity, the program director reports: "The mission of BEST is to provide workforce/employment training skills, in a user friendly environment, in collaboration with state, local and community agencies for homeless adults that will lead to permanent employment and economic stability."

The project primarily targets the audience currently utilizing the Volunteers of America's (VOA) meal program at the Mission facility, with the possibility of being replicated to other parts of the city through other partnerships.

Participants will be provided with a full continuum of services (e.g., workforce assessments, life skill training, job placement, etc.), that brings together both service providers and existing workforce readiness projects to address employment issues specific to homelessness, with the ultimate goal of providing them with employment opportunities both within and outside the VOA facility".

Since BEST began operations in September 2007 we have seen over 60 students successfully complete their CAD training and transition into the workforce (Oil/Gas, DOT, Infrastructure) through partnerships with local engineering firms. We have also been able to do paid contract work for global firms (competing with offshore drafting services) and give our students experience in drafting while continuing their technical education.

We have an individual who came into the program 6 months ago currently serving as our project Administrator in a paid, part-time position training new participants and developing curriculum. He has achieved 5-star Bentley Accreditation, which is recognized industry wide.

BEST was featured as a model for community involvement program at the 2008 U.S. Conference of Mayors in Miami, FL. As well as the May 2008 Issue of BE Magazine.

Congresswoman Waters Holds Hearing on LA Housing Crisis

Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness

On Saturday March 28, 2009 Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Chair of the Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, held an official hearing on the affordable housing crisis in Los Angeles. Susie Shannon, Housing and Homeless Advocate for Los Angeles Coalition

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to End Hunger and Homelessness met with Congresswoman Waters and other affordable housing advocates from the Housing Justice Coalition last December and secured a commitment from the Congresswoman to hold the hearing in Los Angeles.

Addressing the housing subcommittee and a packed audience of members from POWER, Union De Vecinos, L.A.CAN, CES, ACORN and L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness at L.A. Southwest College, affordable housing advocates and residents testified on the housing crisis in Los Angeles and recommended steps that congress can take to address several housing issues. Susie Shannon spoke to the need for legislation that increases both section 8 vouchers and public housing. Shannon delineated the several housing options for the homeless which are now in crisis, including the lack of shelter space, section 8 programs for the homeless which are now to capacity and the extremely long waiting lists for both public housing and section 8. Shannon asked the committee to fully fund HUD, support a moratorium on the demolition/disposition of public housing, asked for one for one replacement, residents' right to return, the reversal of all punitive policies (such as One Strike eviction policies, mandatory community service requirements, and permanent bans on living in subsidized housing if convicted of a felony) that prevent people from accessing public housing and, in many cases, leave them homeless.

Other advocates testifying at the hearing included Professor Ralph Fertig, from the USC School of Social Work, who spoke to the housing crisis facing children and their parents and received a commitment from Congresswoman Waters to introduce a resolution granting children and their parents a human right to housing. Several USC students who worked on the research for the resolution were in attendance. Larry Gross, Executive Director of Coalition for Economic Survival spoke about the need to preserve existing affordable housing and asked the committee to support the addition of 200,000 section 8 vouchers nationally. Tanya Tull, Executive Director of Beyond Shelter, spoke to the crisis facing our growing homeless population and the need to provide alternative shelter options for this population.

In addition, a former public housing resident and a member of Union De Vecinos testified about her experience being forced out of the Pico Aliso public housing development due to the Hope VI demolition project which uprooted her entire family. Minelle Johnson, a section 8 voucher holder, spoke about how obtaining a section 8 voucher through a Beyond Shelter program helped her family and changed her life.

To view the hearing, click [here](#).

Children Without Homes Conference June 15-16

Horizons for Homeless Children will host their fourth Young Children Without Homes Conference in Boston, MA on June 15-16. The conference will provide an opportunity for homeless services providers, educators, health professionals and others to network, strategize and train. To read more or register, click [here](#).

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