

February 18, 2010

ACTION ALERT

CALL ON USICH TO DEVELOP A FEDERAL PLAN ENDING HOMELESSNESS FOR ALL AMERICANS

ACTION REQUESTED: The National Coalition for the Homeless urges people experiencing homelessness, homeless advocates and homeless service providers to contribute to the development of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, by submitting public comments to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). NCH recommends that homeless advocates urge USICH to develop an ambitious and specific plan that provides the national roadmap to bring America home.

BACKGROUND: The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (HEARTH Act) requires the USICH to develop a federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness (FSP). The law requires USICH to submit the plan to Congress by May 2010.

USICH has established a multi-approach process for consultation with the public as it develops the FSP. Steps being taken include:

- Convening of five national expert panels on family, youth, chronic and veteran homelessness and on community participation in the response to homelessness.
- Convening of regional stakeholder dialogues.
- Additional consultations at a national homelessness conference and with special focus groups such as the US Conference of Mayors and the Health Care for the Homeless Consumer Advisory Board.
- Offering an opportunity for the general public to comment on the plan via an electronic system.

NCH is pleased to have been invited to identify people with current or prior homeless experiences for the national expert panels. NCH board members and supporters are participating in the expert panels, national homelessness conference, and regional stakeholder dialogues.

INSTRUCTIONS:

NCH encourages people experiencing homelessness, homeless advocates, and homeless service providers to provide input into the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness by participating in a regional stakeholder dialogue or by electronic input. Instructions follow for each opportunity.

Regional Stakeholder Dialogues

Regional stakeholder dialogues have been set for February 22 (Chicago), February 23 (Dallas), March 2 (San Francisco), and March 3 (Seattle). Individuals are required to register in advance to participate in a regional stakeholder dialogue, and space is limited. To register, please visit <http://www.usich.gov>.

Individuals attending regional stakeholder dialogues are encouraged to complete and return to NCH a regional stakeholder dialogue report form, which may be found at www.nationalhomeless.org.

Electronic Input

USICH is still developing its system for collecting electronic input to inform the federal strategic plan. Please visit the USICH web site frequently for an announcement when electronic input is being taken. In the meantime, prepare your written remarks so that you have them ready to file quickly.

You are invited to send a copy of comments you submit to info@nationalhomeless.org.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

NCH has identified key recommendations that we believe should inform the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. Please relay these recommendations in your own verbal or electronic input to USICH. You are welcome to advocate alternative or additional recommendations.

1. *Bring America Home* – The Bring America Home Act, a comprehensive bill developed by the National Coalition for the Homeless and introduced in the 108th and 109th Congresses, offers a comprehensive federal strategy for preventing and ending homelessness. Since its introduction, Congress has drawn from BAHA and passed components. Likewise, USICH should reference BAHA and populate the FSP with “shovel ready” policy recommendations already before Congress.
2. *Set a Standard for Homelessness in the First Person Decision-Making* – People experiencing homelessness and people with recent homeless experiences should have substantive roles in the development and ongoing monitoring of the FSP and other public policy decisions that affect them. USICH should grant the views and recommendations of people with homeless experiences greater weight than other stakeholders. USICH should commit to organizing and supporting a consumer advisory group to assist USICH in FSP monitoring and in the other work of the Council. USICH members should establish comparable consumer advisory groups or assure inclusion of homeless perspectives in existing advisory bodies. USICH should request Congress for authority to add homeless consumer seats to the USICH.
3. *Ensure the FSP Prevents and Ends Homelessness for All Americans* – The FSP should be organized around policy and program areas rather than subpopulations. The causes and effects of homelessness do not discriminate based on rural, suburban or urban community, disability, family status, or military service experience, and thus neither should federal public policy. As one concrete application of this “all Americans” principle, the FSP should recommend that all federal definitions of homelessness be amended to include all living arrangements understood to be temporary due to the person’s lack of resources to secure permanent housing. Further, estimates of incidence of homelessness and assessments of service needs should include persons in all homeless living arrangements.
4. *Preventing Homelessness Equals Ending Poverty* – Homelessness is the most extreme form of poverty and should be addressed as such. The FSP should articulate that homelessness and poverty shall no longer be considered separate and apart. The FSP should be connected to and integrated into an even broader federal strategic plan to eliminate poverty.
5. *Commit to “Universals”* – The FSP should commit the federal government to, and develop action plans for enacting and implementing just public policies that achieve universal access for all Americans to basic human needs, including the human rights to permanent affordable housing, health care, livable incomes, free and appropriate education, and civil rights.
6. *Tackle Barriers to Mainstream Poverty Alleviation Programs* – The FSP should apply across the gamut of federal poverty alleviation programs those strategies and techniques that have proven effective (including through targeted programs such as McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants, Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness, Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals, Education for Homeless

Children and Youth, and Homeless Veterans Reintegration programs) at paving the way for homeless Americans to access and utilize public programs intended to support low-income people. Examples of such techniques include targeted outreach, tracking of housing status, adapted and tailored programming, and training and technical assistance on homelessness for mainstream program authorities and providers.

7. *Shore Up the Homeless Emergency Response System* – The nation simply cannot abandon responsiveness to the current generation of homeless Americans while striving to implement just public policies for the prevention and end of homelessness. The federal government must redouble its response to the homeless emergency in our very midst, including through increased investment in safety net programs such as Emergency Food and Shelter, Emergency Solutions Grants, Health Care for the Homeless, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.
8. *Protect Civil Rights of the Unhoused* – The lack of a home should in no way endanger a person’s rights associated with United States citizenship or residency, including the right to vote, utilize public space, or receive mail. People experiencing homelessness should be free of harassment from law enforcement and should enjoy equal protection under the law.
9. *Rapidly House Homeless People* – The FSP should pledge full capitalization of the National Housing Trust Fund and increased appropriations for the network of permanent affordable housing programs, including Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 811, Section 202, HOPWA, CDBG, HOME, and rural housing.
10. *Help Homeless People Secure High-Quality, High-Paying Jobs* – The FSP should indicate action steps to rapidly increase homeless people’s access to employment and training opportunities and to work opportunities, including apprenticeships, subsidized employment, transitional jobs, and full employment.
11. *Secure Health Care for Homeless and Low Income People* – The FSP should propose an expansion of public health insurance to more low-income Americans. Health care safety net and disability income assistance programs should be strengthened by removing barriers to eligibility and service for and increasing outreach and enrollment assistance to people experiencing homelessness and others at-risk of homelessness.
12. *Fund the Vision* – Strategic plans are hollow vessels without accompanying resources sufficient for execution. A vigorous federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness must be accompanied by an ambitious federal budget and appropriations commitment.

ACTION RESOURCES: To learn more about the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, visit: <http://www.usich.gov>.

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