

National Coalition for the Homeless

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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 and on behalf of persons experiencing homelessness.

Summary of 2009 Public Policy Recommendations

BRING AMERICA HOME ACT

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 is a comprehensive bill that includes provisions in the areas of housing security, income security, health security, and civil rights. It establishes that it is a national goal to fulfill the basic human need of shelter for all Americans. BAHA was introduced in the 108th and 109th Congresses by the late Representative Julia Carson (D-IN). NCH has strengthened the bill's content since its development five years ago and is preparing for its reintroduction in the 111th Congress.

HOUSING JUSTICE

National Housing Trust Fund: In July 2008, Congress and the President enacted into law an omnibus housing measure that included the establishment of a National Housing Trust Fund. The NHTF is a permanent federal program intended to increase and preserve the supply of rental housing for extremely low and very low income families. Currently, NCH and others are seeking to secure additional permanent funding sources for the NHTF, in addition to annual contributions from Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. NCH supports the TARP to Main Street Act of 2009 (H.R. 3068), which dedicates a portion of the dividends that private companies pay the federal government under TARP to the NHTF. Advocates are also working with HUD to develop regulations for implementing the NHTF.

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. In December 2008, an annual survey from the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 12 major cities reported an increase in homelessness as a result of foreclosure, with renters of foreclosed properties being the victims most vulnerable to homelessness. NCH and others are urging Congress to include additional funds for homelessness prevention and re-housing in any legislative response to the foreclosure crisis, and are also seeking to pass legislation that would help renters living in foreclosed properties to remain in their homes or transition smoothly to new housing.

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. In May 2009, President Obama signed into law a measure to increase the funding level for the HUD McKinney-Vento programs and consolidate programs into a more efficient system. While NCH commends Congress for their work on this long-overdue action, the legislation failed to address a number of NCH's concerns about aspects of the bill that limit the participation of some stakeholders in the decision-making process, restrict communities from using funds in the way that makes sense on a local level, and authorize a client data collection system without first putting sufficient privacy

protections in place. NCH will continue to work with legislators and the Administration to address these concerns, and will also work to increase the appropriation levels for HUD McKinney-Vento programs in fiscal year 2010.

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 (the continuum of care application process) 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. Funds for that program could be used for homelessness prevention, emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, and capacity-building assistance. NCH is seeking a Congressperson to sponsor the Rural Homeless Assistance Act in the next Congress. As an interim measure, NCH looks forward to contributing to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study being conducted on the unmet homeless assistance needs in rural communities.

Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers: 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 and others urge Congress to authorize and appropriate funds for additional Housing Choice Vouchers to provide the lowest-income households with rental assistance. Ultimately, NCH and others back the addition of two million additional vouchers into the housing assistance system. NCH supports the Section Eight Voucher Reform Act, which includes an authorization of additional Housing Choice Vouchers.

HEALTH CARE JUSTICE

Universal Health Care: 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. Once people become homeless, they have shorter life spans than housed persons, and are three or four times more likely to die prematurely due at least in part to untreated medical problems. NCH will be working with homeless and health care advocacy partners to ensure that the Obama Health Care Plan guarantees access and eliminates all financial barriers to comprehensive health services for all Americans.

Homeless Access to Recovery and Treatment: 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). Homelessness presents serious barriers to treatment for behavioral health conditions. People experiencing homelessness present complex challenges for which most mainstream providers are ill-equipped or untrained.

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. As for wages, the payment levels under SSI are insufficient for obtaining affordable housing. NCH will be working with President Obama and the Congress 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.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Hate Crimes Against the Homeless: Since its first annual report on the subject in 1999, NCH has documented over 700 unprovoked violent attacks against homeless people, with over 200 of those attacks resulting in death. Those incidents have included setting a man on fire, pushing a sleeping woman into a river, and beating a woman's face with a tire-iron. 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 and its sister bill, the Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Enforcement Act, would direct the FBI to gather data on potential hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness, and to prosecute accordingly. Those

bills were introduced in the 110th Congress by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX). NCH is preparing for reintroduction of those bills in the 111th Congress.