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 Hello,

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In this issue:

1. Rallying to Save Our Homes!
2. Panhandling in America
3. House Considers Affordable Housing Fund
4. Low Wages, High Housing Costs
5. Maine Takes a Step in the Right Direction in Helping its Homeless Population
6. Homeless Tobacco Users at High Risk
7. Tobacco Survey
8. Asking Around
9. Goodbye from Molly Neck

Rallying to Save Our Homes!



By Kelly Fawcett NCH Intern from Oregon State University '06

On the morning of Tuesday June 28th, representatives from the National Alliance of HUD Tenants, National Coalition for the Homeless, Empower DC, Manna CDC, and advocates of Section 8 Housing Vouchers gathered on the corner of 2nd and Massachusetts Avenue to rally against proposed budget cuts and changes to the current Section 8 program. The crowd gained support from passing motorists and pedestrians as they made their way toward the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA) to discuss new reforms in the Section 8 low income housing policy.

The Section 8 Housing Vouchers allow low income households to pay reduced rent

costs, helping to prevent those experiencing poverty from becoming homeless. The program currently serves over 200 million households, most of which are working families with children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. With Section 8, families can secure housing in the private sector market and live in safer neighborhoods with better schools than comparable public housing programs. At this time, only one out of four eligible households are being served, there are extremely long waiting lists in communities across the nation.

The welfare of Section 8 Housing has recently been under attack with the proposition of a new bill, called the State and Local Housing Flexibility Act (S 771 and HR 1999). The bill was introduced in Congress by Representative Gary Miller (R-CA) and designed by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If passed, it would make many changes to the Section 8 voucher and public housing programs, such as providing Public Housing Associations broad flexibility in implementing the program. This flexibility could put thousands of low income tenants at risk due to radical changes in how the Section 8 program would be implemented.

The Bush Administration has also proposed deep budget cuts to the Housing and Urban Development budget which provides funding for Section 8 programs. The Administration wants to freeze Section 8 subsidies at their current level to force a 30% cut to the voucher budget by 2010. In the proposed budget for 2006, immediate cuts in funding to HUD programs of \$3 billion would cause over 375,000 tenants under Section 8 to lose their homes. Traditionally, the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association has advocated with low income tenants for support against these forces. However, some housing authorities are beginning to support Bush's proposals in order to gain more flexibility to run programs. This flexibility can have a very negative impact for Section 8 recipients because under the proposed State and Local Housing Flexibility Act, rents would no longer be linked to a household's income.

Current Section 8 regulations require that residents spend 30% of their adjusted income on housing. This is the federal standard for housing affordability and it allows rents to stay affordable for low income people. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates that there was a 37% increase in the cost of modest rental housing between 1999 and 2003, which is far higher than the increases in income experienced by residents. As housing becomes more and more unaffordable, the importance of having well implemented programs like Section 8 is obvious.

The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act has three main parts. The first section replaces housing vouchers with a block grant that eliminates most federal protections for low income families. Under the current program, federal funding is linked to changes in the number of vouchers and actual voucher costs. With the new proposals, agencies would receive a fixed amount of funding that would be independent of the number of vouchers or voucher costs. The state and local agencies would carry a large burden in making up for funding shortfalls. These funding shortfalls would cause housing agencies to have no choice but to serve less people in need. Or, it may encourage agencies to deny help to the poorest families in order to be able to serve more moderately poor residents. This would obscure the link between federal funding levels and the number of families assisted and make future budget cuts more likely.

The second section eliminates limits on rents for families with vouchers and residents in public housing. As mentioned before, current standards require that Section 8 recipients pay 30% of their income towards rent; this policy ensures that the client will

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recipients pay 30% of their income towards rent; this policy ensures that the client will have enough money left to pay for food and other living costs. This new amendment would allow agencies to set their own standards at any level, and housing agencies would be under pressure to save money by shifting to higher rates. This could cause many low income households to not be able to afford housing, going against the very principle that Section 8 was originally based on.

The final section grants Housing and Urban Development (HUD) the power to waive virtually all of the rules governing vouchers and public housing without input from Congress or the community. For example, HUD could allow funding intended for vouchers to be used in other ways. Tenants also fear a time limit being established for recipients of Section 8.

The group of about 100 protestors carried signs displaying messages like, "Keep our Rents at 30%." There were supporters from all over the country, including advocates from as far away as Texas, Oregon, and California. The main arguments presented against the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association were to: fully fund all HUD housing programs, increase Section 8 funds to secure rights to housing, kill Bush's housing bill that cuts funding, to withdraw PHADA from a tiered rent program, have no time limits or increases in rent support for tenants, and to keep all HUD housing affordable.

Tim Keizer came out and spoke as a representative of the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA), and also distributed a pamphlet on rent reform that specified the changes that were being advocated for by PHADA. A major strength of the new rent reform is that it is far simpler than the current program. PHADA also claims that this would improve efficiency as it would offer administrative relief from the current complex patchwork of rent policies that are currently in place.

PHADA proposed the new rent reform because many feel that the current system is unfair. In the released report, PHADA points out many problems such as how similarly situated residents may pay significantly different rents for virtually identical housing, and how the current policy confuses applicants, tenants, housing authority staff, policy makers and the general public. PHADA also claims that rent reform is needed because recipients are punished for earning new income by having to pay higher rent costs.

To address these problems, PHADA is urging HUD and Congress to implement assisted housing rent reform by employing one of the two rent setting policies: (a) A tiered rent structure that resembles rent setting policies in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, or (b) A percentage of gross income rent structure that acknowledges differential tax treatment of earned income, pension income, and other unearned income. PHADA representative Tim Kaiser said that details of the new report would be decided on in a meeting with the board of directors this coming September. At the rally, Kaiser opposed Bush's bill that would bring major budget cuts to Section 8 funding, but only on the grounds that the provided funding would not be flexible enough for administration purposes. He didn't take a stand on how it may cause thousands of tenants to become homeless.

Michael Kane, executive director of the National Alliance of HUD Tenants, felt that the new rent reform would be problematic. It would lower rents for many low income tenants, but only at the expense of raising rent for those who are of the lowest income brackets. In other words, the poorest tenants would be the hardest hit with the new reform. Kane was also disappointed that Kaiser was unable to address the issue of Section 8 time limits for tenants, and that Kaiser refused to endorse the National Alliance of HUD Tenants member summit statement that outlined the main arguments presented
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of HUD Tenants voucher summit statement that outlined the main arguments presented against PHADA.

Another weakness of the rent reform report is that it is extremely difficult to understand. Kaiser contends that the report was written with the intent of being understood by members of Congress, PHADA, and HUD, as well as tenants and current Section 8 recipients; however, Kaiser did acknowledge that the information in the report could be too complicated for many individuals to comprehend. Tenants and advocates of Section 8 housing will have a hard time developing a position on the new measures if they can't understand the details of the reform.

Kane and the National Alliance of HUD Tenants plan to write PHADA a statement outlining the problems with the new rent reform. Kaiser agreed to present the statement to the board of directors before the September meeting. Kane also encourages local authorities and Section 8 advocates to continue their efforts in opposing Bush's bill and new reforms to Section 8 housing. The National Alliance of HUD Tenants recommends that advocates call the senators and congressperson's district offices to thank them for current Section 8 funding, and to ask specifically for continued support in the coming year. The alliance also suggests that you can contact your local housing authority or mayor's office to voice your opinion.

Supporters of Section 8 housing will hopefully see the positive results from efforts at the rally in coming months when PHADA reviews the statement provided by the National Alliance of HUD Tenants. It was clear from the spirit of the crowd that supporters must not lose hope and that affiliates will continue to advocate for positive changes and continued funding for Section 8 programs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ask the Executive Director of your local public housing authority to support tenants and oppose any changes that would harm them or increase rents unnecessarily.

Call your representatives and Senators and ask them to oppose any changes to the Section 8 Program that would harm tenants.

Panhandling in America

By Brian Davis

I have to admit that I cannot stand being hustled by a panhandler in D.C. or San Francisco or my city of Cleveland. I view the man or woman asking me for money as a living symbol of the failure of capitalism to include humanity in the bottom line. The panhandlers are trying to wring that last quarter in the rain, snow, and heat out of those big-hearted souls who are not so jaded by modern society. While all homeless people are not panhandlers, and certainly not all panhandlers are homeless, advocates from around the country are obligated to speak up against the rising level of ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

homeless, advocates from around the country are obligated to speak up against the rising level of hostility toward panhandlers. All of these wasted laws are put in place to “revitalize” our urban downtown that is being raped by suburban flight, tax abatements, and business improvement districts.

Americans have tried to outlaw panhandling and visibly homeless people for decades, but with little success. For centuries, emperors, dictators and mayors have tried to get rid of panhandlers also with little success. San Francisco has tried to get a handle on panhandling for 20 years in a strict and severe manner, but the problem is still out of control. In Ohio, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, and now Cleveland have all tried to reduce panhandling with various laws, but as usual with little success. In fact, we have seen an increase in panhandling in many of our cities, but that certainly has a great deal to do with the lack of a decent paying jobs and the shrinking number of affordable places to live. More than anything else, every time someone is forced to ask for a handout is a commentary on how far off track we are as a society, and in our nation’s capital that commentary is a sizable novel. In the cradle of democracy, the place where with one stroke of the pen we could end homelessness, the District of Columbia has one of the largest concentrations of panhandlers in North America.

There are effective alternatives to making criminals out of an already isolated group of people. We recommend trying incentive programs and if that does not work try luring the panhandlers into micro-enterprise projects through competition. Anti-panhandling legislation typically has very little impact on the problem, and will certainly not discourage panhandling. These laws cost more time in police enforcement and clog the courts as well as cost American cities additional legal fees to defend themselves against Constitutional challenges.

This legislation takes away a person’s right to criticize the government and to tell their fellow citizens that the capitalist economy is not working for them. We cannot deny that many panhandlers have health issues that are not being addressed from mental illness to chemical addictions, but should we as a society put a muzzle on a segment of our population unable to find help for a health problem? I view the panhandler standing on the street corner saying, “George Bush and my government cannot help me with a decent job and decent health care. My Mayor could not prevent my house from being foreclosed on; can you please help me with some change?” This is shortened to “Can you give me a dollar?” in order to save time. Every citizen that we pass asking for money is criticizing our government for not providing a hand up when they began to fall. Do we want to silence this quiet form of political protest?

Panhandlers are fairly intelligent, and will figure out ways around this legislation to continue to enjoy the protections of the first amendment to speak their mind. They may become street performers or will become panhandler mimes to get around the local laws. The main reason that this will not work is that the victims of aggressive panhandlers or those who are asked for money in prohibited areas do not have the time or desire to follow up with a police report and one day off work in court. In addition, there are no protections for the public to assure that police are not issuing frivolous tickets or tickets based on discriminatory biases.

If the business community is so interested in eliminating panhandling then how about putting some money and resources to actually do something about the disparity that exists. How about putting a pool of money together to foster alternatives and competition to panhandling? How about requiring all local businesses to pay a Universal Living Wage that is tied to the cost of housing? Increasing the amount of money a person receives at every job is the best strategy to make panhandling unattractive. The reality is that often a person can make more money begging for money than working 8 to 10 hours in a day. Wouldn't anyone of us rather work inside at a factory for \$12 per hour than having to be on the rainy cold streets of America asking for money?

House Considers Affordable Housing Fund

By Avi Wolfman-Arent

As a part of its proposal to reform the federal housing programs at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the U.S. House of Representatives is considering legislation that would set up a fund for development of low-income housing.

Affordable housing advocates praise this move as huge step forward for low-income housing development. But opponents claim that these two government-sponsored entities that promote homeownership would use the fund to leverage their influence on Capitol Hill.

The Affordable Housing Fund included in the 2005 Federal Housing Finance Reform Act would delegate 5% of the after-tax profits of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to a fund designed to promote an increase in available low-income housing.

As the fund is currently designed, 90% of the money would be designated for "production, preservation and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing," while the remaining 10% would be used for "homeownership activities."

Advocates contend that the money would benefit people with low and extremely low incomes, and that it also would help draw developers to poorer communities.

The House Financial Services Committee passed the bill on a 65-5 vote, and the measure now awaits action on the House floor. Experts believe a floor vote will occur sometime before the summer recess, which starts Aug. 1.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates the fund would generate between \$400 million and \$600 million in its first year and more than \$1 billion a year in the future.

The money "would encourage developers to build low-income housing," said Matt Achhammer, an organizer with NLIHC's Heat Up for Housing campaign.

The funds would subsidize companies that construct low-income residences, because building such housing often is not economically feasible, he added.

Opponents of the affordable housing provision argue that the fund would be used to win favor with legislators by placing housing projects in certain congressional districts. Some in Congress also say the money could be used to support advocacy groups.

Supporters, however, insist that the bill does not offer Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac that kind of wiggle room.

"The way the legislation is currently written, it clearly outlines what the money can be used for," says Achhammer.

Although an amendment to eliminate the fund failed in the House Financial Services Committee, opposition to the fund continues.

Led by Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.), a group of 34 House Republicans has lobbied party leaders to oppose

5/14/2009

Safety Network Email Newsletter

the provision and has said it will attempt to defeat the broader bill if it includes a low-income housing fund.

In a letter to Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas), Pence and his colleagues agree there is a need to increase the availability of low-income housing. They claim, however, that the proposed fund is inherently adverse to basic capitalist philosophy.

“We believe creating additional regulations such as these ... works against the free-market principles that have made our nation’s housing market one of the most accessible in the world,” they said.

Rep. Michael Oxley (R-Ohio), chairman of the Financial Services Committee, is hoping to reach a compromise. He is proposing stricter regulation of the money by not linking it directly to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac profits.

Linda Couch, deputy director of NLIHC, said she supports Oxley’s initiative.

“Mr. Oxley is really trying to appease [the opposition] and we hope he makes some progress,” Couch said. “The people in the Senate and the House have said they want tighter accountability.”

Oxley and other bill supporters may need such changes to obtain Senate support. Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), chairman of the Banking Committee, said he will not support a fund based on the entities’ profits because that would encourage Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to grow recklessly.

If the bill passes, supporters contend, it could benefit the area homeless community by providing more opportunities for those hoping to move out of shelters.

“To get out of transitional housing,” Achhammer said, “you need those low- income options available.”

The fund would be the first congressional action to promote low-income housing since 1990, the NLIHC’s Couch said.

The initiative is in response to a rental market that is “extremely saturated,” she added.

A 2003 survey found that 34.9% of Americans live in unaffordable or insufficient housing. The survey also showed that low-income individuals - those earning 50% or less of the area median income - represent 37.8% of the general population but 68.6% of those with housing difficulties.

Research published by NLIHC suggested that the amount of affordable housing for low-income renters has declined significantly in the last three decades.

Supporters of the fund hope for a vote soon and believe that if the House voted now the package most likely would pass.

House approval, however, would be only the first step for advocates in what looks to be an intense political battle over the legislative package, especially the affordable-housing initiative.

Low Wages High Housing Costs

The Center for Housing Policy reports that since 1997 the number of *working* families that spend more than half of their income on housing has grown nearly 70 percent to around 5 million households. The critical burden these families face is a result of several factors including skyrocketing housing costs, a serious lack of affordable housing options, and the inability of the minimum wage to adjust with economic growth. As a result, more and more families are being forced to leave the culture and community of their hometowns, sacrifice basic necessities like health insurance or food, and raise children in environments ill-suited for developing minds.

One of the major forces behind this growth in necessary overextension is a lack of
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affordable housing that continues to get worse. In a report by the Housing Assistance Council entitled *The Paved Paradise...Gentrification in Rural Communities*, three case studies outline reasons for the decline in and elimination of affordable housing in rural and suburban communities. In all three cases, citizens with low incomes are being “locked out” of their local housing markets and forced to move to communities farther away from their places of employment because of local economic and population growth. In each case, economic growth translates into greater amounts of housing aimed at middle and upper class households, which further causes surrounding property values to increase eliminating low cost options.

This brand of growth has continued to the point where the most cherished members of our society, the people that protect us from fires and criminals and the people that teach and care for our children, cannot afford an average home in our country. The average cost for a home in 2003 was \$176,000: an increase of 11 percent from 2001. The incomes of police officers, teachers, and nurses rose only 4 to 7 percent. This disparity has an even greater impact on households whose chief wage earners receive only minimum wage.

The current minimum wage will only keep a 40 hour-a-week worker at 70 percent of the government standard poverty line. A report by the Children’s Defense Fund outlines the fact that an increase in the minimum wage would benefit around 5.3 million adults currently receiving minimum or just above minimum wage. Thus an increase in the minimum wage would help 1 and a half million working households with incomes approaching or at the minimum wage. This includes the approximately 9 million children of those households with at least one minimum wage worker.

To offset these low wages and high housing costs, families are forced to spend less on groceries, insurance, and healthcare or risk large debt to have those necessities. In *Something’s Gotta Give*, the Center for Housing Policy reveals that spending the majority of a household’s income on housing may prohibit buying proper amounts of food, purchasing health insurance, or seeking adequate healthcare. In order to pay for those groceries and premiums, families usually turn to credit cards or other forms of credit. The Assets and Opportunity Scorecard put out by C.F.E.D. confirms that this method of financing regular family business is increasing with more families lacking checking accounts, lacking health insurance, and generally “owing more than they own.”

Furthermore, the Center for Housing Policy identifies the more complicated decisions households must make regarding transportation and communities. The household may choose to sacrifice a good neighborhood for increased transportation costs in order to have a cheaper home. ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

Otherwise, the household decides to sacrifice much-needed income for a nicer neighborhood that is closer to the family members' jobs. This choice drastically affects how the children are brought up, how much time is or is not wasted commuting, how much time is spent with the children, and the overall quality of life for the entire family.

When discussing issues of affordable housing supplies, it is imperative to relate the overall effect this issue has on families, children and communities. Also, because the lower classes contribute much more to local economies than do the upper classes, the effects of a larger minimum wage and greater amounts of affordable housing are two fold. Eliminating cost burdens then, ultimately, helps all parts of society and it is important to stress this fact.

Maine Takes a Step in the Right Direction in Helping its Homeless Population

By Natalie Khorochev NCH Intern from University of California at Berkley '06

It is estimated that over 1,200 men, women, and children are homeless on any single day in Maine, and approximately 10,000 people utilize the state's homeless shelters each year^[1].

In lieu of this, last month, on June 15, 2005, Governor John Balducci of Maine signed into law LD 1659. The legislation was titled: *Act to Amend Laws Governing Crimes against People who are Homeless*.

The ideas for this legislation came from Sandra Wachholz, associate professor of criminology at the University of Southern Maine, whose research focuses on hate crimes against the homeless. After a visit to the Preble Street Resource Center, Wachholz collaborated with Donna Yellen, from the Preble Street Consumer Advocacy Project and Stephen Wessler, former prosecuting attorney at Maine's Attorney General's Office. Soon after, Wessler went on to write the initial proposal of the legislation, taking the necessary first steps to ensure in the future that "homeless" is a protected category under Maine law.

Throughout Maine, and other parts of the country, people experiencing homelessness have been subjected to violence, attacks, harassment, and assault. For the homeless in this country, "public space is the realm in which they are forced to conduct the fragmented task of daily survival... The types of space[s] that [are] frequently used by the homeless for resting, such as sidewalks and parking lots near soup kitchens, shelters and social service agencies, function as stigma symbols that expose their status"^[2]. These factors make homeless people more visibly identifiable and characterized as "homeless". If this is not enough, various statutes have been passed which legally ban sleeping and resting in public areas, panhandling, and loitering.

People experiencing homelessness become objects of fear and loathing as well as subjects of hate-motivated crime and violence. They are blamed for their poverty while struggling to maintain their dignity, humanity, and more importantly trying to stay alive on the streets. Their attempts to recreate their lives are compromised by those stereotypes, which go to ensure that “the homeless are situated at the margins of public space.”^[3] Other responses view homeless people as addicts, lazy, and dangerous.

The brutal murder of 53-year-old homeless man Michael Roberts by a group of teenagers in Holly Hill, Florida last month is a clear example of the hate crimes that are committed against homeless people every year. Roberts was severely beaten and left in pool of his own blood by five boys who were “looking for fun” and “something to do”^[4], returning a total of three times, punching and beating the man with sticks and a log before killing him.

On June 29th, 2005, an editorial in the Portland Press Herald regarding whether or not the state of Maine should provide protection for homeless people under its human rights stature, drew a number of heated responses. One response in particular titled, “Think Again About Having Law to Protect Homeless as a Group” from a Maine resident named Jay York, boldly stated, “I think we residents are the ones needing protection.”^[5] However, these types of responses do not take into account the vulnerabilities that homeless people experience everyday as they live and sleep unprotected and visible on the streets. This was the case for Michael Roberts who had no safe place to call home.

The aforementioned legislation, in Maine, was the first of its kind to support the need for laws to address crimes committed against homeless people. The act added “homelessness” to the factors that a court may take into consideration in leading to the enhancement of sentences^[6]. This is part of the goal to protect people who are homeless and punish those who commit crimes against them.

The Act requires that the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy include police training to reduce barriers in reporting crimes against people who are homeless^[7].

Lastly, the Act directs the Commissioner of Public Safety and the Attorney General to review the relationship between law enforcement agencies and people who are homeless. More specifically, this requires the exploration of improving that relationship by instating at least one officer per agency to serve as a liaison between the law enforcement agency and the homeless community^[8].

To further scope of this legislation, Attorney General Steven Rowe has been commissioned to form a task force in order to consider adding “homelessness” as an aggravating factor for judges to consider in sentencing.

Overall, this act was proposed in hopes of protecting people experiencing homelessness who are frequently the victims of crimes and violence. These crimes often go unreported because of the belief that complaints by homeless people will not be taken seriously by the police. Rectifying this barrier is one of the key strategies to protecting the homeless population and instituting justice to those who have committed crimes against them.

During testimonies regarding LD 1659, some opposition surfaced from the judiciary committee in Maine; stereotypes arose that viewed the homeless as “from away”, or non-native to Maine, and therefore should not be granted support from the state.

Despite these challenges, LD 1659 was signed into law and thereafter support for extended protection for Maine’s homeless population, under the human and civil rights statute, came from a number of residents. A series of letters printed in the Portland Press Herald titled “Homeless need law’s protection” detailed their thoughts. The following are various excerpts from the column^[9]:

“The homeless population is subject to danger and humiliation that most of us can only imagine. To be given protection under Maine’s human rights statute is not only just, it is also long overdue.”

“Depicting the homeless in this light [dirty, urinating and defecating on people’s lawns] is dangerous and fuels the perception that [they] are in some way ‘no good’. This is exactly why Maine’s homeless [people] have been victimized by violence and need protection under the law...One’s ill-conceived perception that the homeless are all defecating drunks and violent sexual predators, makes it easy for people to rationalize beating them.”

“The way most homeless people are treated by some ‘regular people’ is with cruelty, hate and ignorance. There is so much against a person when they become homeless...As long as people see homeless folks as horrible people, it will remain very hard for them to get homes and jobs, and very easy for people to hurt and harass them.”

This type of legislation is a step in the right direction especially as hate crimes are increasing and “are signals of discontent, suffering and inequality” says Wachholz, “think again about not having these laws.”^[10] However, acts amending laws governing crime against homeless people, or those protecting them, are rare and a move toward such is often met with reluctance and opposition.

These protective measures are needed in places such as Volusia County, Florida, where the Holly Hill murder occurred. In this county, there are only 44 emergency shelter beds to serve an estimated homeless population of 2,666 people, according to the Volusia-Flagler Homeless Coalition[11].

Last week U.S Rep. John Mica, R-Winter Park, spoke with Michael Stoops, acting executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, and agreed to work on acquiring federal funding to expand the shelter system and increase the number of available beds. However, Mica was reluctant to support a congressional study on violence against the homeless that would support efforts to provide more federal money to programs that combat homelessness[12].

In addition to establishing the necessary programs that aid people experiencing homelessness, protection under law is key in reducing the victimization and criminalization of homeless men, women, and children. It is thus imperative that measures aimed to end homelessness include increasing the availability of housing and supportive services. These must coincide with laws protecting homeless people and repealing anti-homeless legislation to alleviate the problems of homelessness.

A study released in February 2005 by the Center for Prevention of Hate Violence in Maine, *Homeless and Hated: Bias Motivated Violence, Degradation and Discrimination Against Maine's Homeless* proposes a number of recommendations (for the full report visit <http://www.usm.maine.edu/csphv>) [13]:

- Amend the Maine Civil Rights Act to include homelessness and also add it to the criminal hate crime sentence enhancement provision
- Provide mandatory law enforcement training
- Amend the Maine Human Rights Act to include homelessness to provide homeless person with legal protection against discrimination in public accommodations, employment and housing
- Provide educational programs for middle and high school students

These recommendations are a necessity in changing the conditions that make homeless people susceptible to crime and violence. Combined with efforts to increase the homeless population's right to housing and other basic needs, the number of people experiencing homelessness and the difficulties of living on the streets could be vastly reduced.

- [1] Messner, S & Melnick, A. (2005). *Homeless and Hated: Bias Motivated Violence, Degradation and Discrimination Against Maine's Homeless*. Maine: Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence.
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- [3] Mitchell, D. (1997). The annihilation of space by law: The roots and implications of anti-homeless laws in the United States. *Antipode*. 29 (3), 303-335.
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- [5] Erickson, E. (2005, May 24). Maine should protect the homeless. *Portland Press Herald*.
- [6] Laws of Maine. (2005). LD 1659: An Act To Amend the Laws Governing Crimes against People Who Are Homeless. Maine: Maine Legislature.
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- [8] *Ibid.*
- [9] Homeless need law's protection. (2005, July 5). *Portland Press Herald*, Voice of the People.
- [10] Wachholz, S. (2005, July 8). Being Homeless: Navigating through Hate. *Portland Press Herald*, Letter to the Editor.
- [11] Circelli, D. (2005, July 15). Death puts homeless in national spotlight. *Orlando Sentinel*
- [12] *Ibid*
- [13] Messner, S & Melnick, A. (2005). *Homeless and Hated: Bias Motivated Violence, Degradation and Discrimination Against Maine's Homeless*. Maine: Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence.

Homeless Tobacco Users at Higher Risks

By Amy Warnick, NCH Intern from Allegheny College '06

Even though smoking is the major cause of ill health and premature death among the homeless, many of those working with people experiencing homelessness do not see tobacco cessation as a priority. Several alcohol and other drug facilities, along with mental health programs ignore tobacco use among clients. Other diseases and addictions are seen as more pressing. It is a common myth that the dual recovery of alcohol/drugs and tobacco reduces recovery success and increases the chances of relapse.[1] Moreover, there is a perception that funds are better used for after school programs, housing, etc. Thus, few efforts are funded for prevention and cessation among homeless people.

According to the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty, 430,000 people die a year from tobacco use. Tobacco kills more people than AIDS, alcohol, heroin, crack, suicide, murder, and car accidents COMBINED.[2] Every pack of cigarettes takes two hours off a person's life. Smoking is not only deadly, but it is also expensive. If a one pack a day smoker quit smoking, he or she would save about \$1,500 a year. Tobacco companies intentionally target minorities, women, youth, and the poor. They reach targets through direct and indirect advertising, community outreach and sponsorships. Unfortunately, tobacco companies have had more success at reaching out to certain populations than tobacco education and cessation programs.

An alarming number of homeless people use tobacco. One study estimates that the prevalence of smoking among homeless people is as high as 60 to 75%.[3] High smoking
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rates alone put people at risk of death and disease. However, a combination of factors place homeless tobacco users at an even higher risk. Bad nutrition and adverse environmental conditions lead to poor health that is exacerbated by smoking. Moreover, homeless people tend to misuse tobacco products that increase the intake of toxic substances and infectious agents. The most common high risk practices are cigarette sharing and smoking discarded cigarette butts. Thus, it is not surprising that homeless smokers suffer from higher rates of disease than non-homeless smokers. The prevalence of obstructive lung disorder is more than double the expected prevalence in the general population.[4] Incidents of hypertension are more common among homeless smokers as well.

Smoking cessation programs have the potential to reduce incidents of disease and mortality. Knowledge of the risks of smoking and the benefits of quitting are equally high in groups of homeless and non-homeless smokers.[5] However, homeless smokers are less likely to be prepared to quit smoking. Having an illness that a smoker thinks is tobacco related, self-confidence and social support networks for quitting are all associated with the readiness to quit and smoking cessation among homeless people. According to a study done by the University of Pittsburgh, the most commonly preferred assistance is nicotine replacement and self-efficacy to quit increases if that assistance is provided.[6] The available data seems to indicate that encouraging homeless shelters to be smoke free and providing smoking cessation on site may increase the rate of quitting. The Salvation Army has recently begun to address tobacco addiction by including tobacco in its substance abuse treatment program. Partnering tobacco cessation programs with agencies that have historically provided services to the impoverished has the potential to reach such a high risk population.

Since there is only a small amount of research on tobacco use among homeless people, the National Coalition for the Homeless with the support of the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty has begun its own inquiries into tobacco use and cessation. Surveys were recently sent out to D.C. area shelters, soup kitchens and churches. The NCH also plans to participate in the design of the D.C. Tobacco Quitline. Please contact Michael Stoops at mstoops@nationalhomeless.org or call 202- 462-4822 for more information.

[1] Chinakarn, T. (2003). Breathe easy in recovery. *NNTP News*, 3.

[2] National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty. (2005). *Tobacco Cessation for Correctional Populations: a Health Education Manual*.

[3] Arnsten, J.H., Reid, K., Bierer, M., & Rigotti, N. (2004). Smoking behavior and interest in quitting among homeless smokers. *Addictive Behaviors*, 29, 1155-1161.

[4] Snyder, L.D. & Eisner, M.D. (2004). Obstructive lung disease among the urban homeless. *Chest*, 125(5), 1719-.

[5] Butler, J., Okuyemi, K.S., Jean, S., Nazir, N., Ahluwalia, J.S., & Resnicow, K. (2002). Smoking characteristics of a homeless population. *Substance Abuse*, 23(4), 223-31.

[6] Connor, S.E., Cook, R.L., Herbert, M.I., Neal, S.M., & Williams, J.T. (2002). Smoking cessation in a

Tobacco Survey

The National Coalition for the Homeless supports the work of the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty (NNTPP), a program of the Health Education Council, which focuses on preventing and reducing tobacco use in low-income communities.

Please take a moment to complete the following survey if you work in an organization such as a shelter or soup kitchen that offers assistance to those experiencing homelessness. Your answers will help guide the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty, and the National Coalition for the Homeless on their next activity phase.

When you have completed the survey, please mail it to the National Coalition for the Homeless at:
2201 P Street NW Washington, DC 20037

You may also fax us completed surveys at: 202-462-4823

OR you may fill out the survey online on our website at: www.nationalhomelessness.org

Thanks for your time! Your responses will help guide further research and funding to this issue.

Please Note: Your responses will be kept confidential.

1. Your name, title, organization, address, and phone number:

2. How would you describe your organization? Circle all that apply:

Shelter

Soup Kitchen

Transitional Housing

Permanent Housing

Other (please specify):

3. Do you feel that tobacco is an important issue to address with the participants or residents you serve? Please circle one:

Yes

No

Don't know

4. Does your organization have a written tobacco use policy in place? Please circle one:

Yes

No

Don't Know

5. How would you describe your tobacco use policy? Please circle all that apply:

Tobacco is prohibited within my organization's main facility AND on the grounds.

Tobacco use is prohibited within my organizations facility only.

Tobacco use is allowed only in designated areas inside my organizations main facility.

Tobacco use is allowed only in designated areas outside my organizations main facility.

Other (please specify)

6. How would you rate the compliance from clients with your organization's tobacco use policy?
Please circle one:

Most are non compliant and ignore the policy

Most are compliant, but sometimes people ignore the policy

Most are compliant all of the time

Other (please specify):

7. How would you rate the enforcement of your organizations tobacco use policy? Please circle one:

The policy is never enforced

The policy is moderately enforced, but not always

The policy is strongly enforced all of the time

8. If your organization does NOT have a written tobacco use policy in place, please circle all that apply:

We have no need of adopting a policy at this time

We would like assistance with policy adoption

We have discussed adopting a policy, but currently have nothing in place

We have drafted policy language, and are moving towards adoption

We have tried to adopt a policy in the past without success

Other (please specify):

9. Does your organization offer programs to help people stop smoking or using tobacco? Please circle one:

Yes

No

Don't know

10. If your organization is interested in helping people stop using tobacco, what types of resources do you think would help? Circle all that apply:

- Self help tobacco cessation materials
- Tobacco education/cessation classroom curriculums
- Referrals to stop-smoking hotlines with phone counselors
- Over the counter drug therapy resources (gum, patches)
- Assistance with developing tobacco policy language
- Other:

Asking Around

By Anna Fogel NCH Intern from Harvard University

A group of interns and students, joined by attorneys, sat in a conference room of the Womble Carlyle law office, discussing treatment by police of people experiencing homelessness. The National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) and the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH) organized the gathering to present their survey project analyzing this topic.

This survey was initiated in response to complaints that WLCH received from clients regarding police treatment and interactions. The relationship between the police and homeless is an issue that NLCHP has focused on nationally, and the two groups collaborated for this local project with national implications. The project was proposed to Womble Carlyle who is serving in a legal advisory capacity. Almost a dozen interns were recruited to assist in surveying a portion of the 8,000 people experiencing homelessness in Washington D.C. The surveyors are organized around a weekly schedule, many times coordinating with local soup kitchens and meal vans.

The survey includes questions on a variety of police interaction with the homeless. The questions address activity in the last year, such as citations, arrests, property confiscation, requests to “move on”, and general harassment. The questions were motivated by complaints in each of these areas.

This survey is also responding to a larger national trend: the criminalization of homelessness. This criminalization is expressed as the creation of laws against activities associated with homelessness, such as sitting, sleeping, or eating in public areas, activities that are necessary for living, and for people experiencing homelessness, must be performed in public. Criminalization is also manifested in selective enforcement of certain laws, such as jaywalking or loitering, laws that are not commonly enforced. In many states there are laws against panhandling, which particularly target people experiencing homelessness and poor people.

This trend in the increasing number of laws criminalizing homelessness coincides with a rise in homelessness over the past couple of years. In the 2004 U.S. Conference of Mayors Report, 70% of the surveyed cities reported an increase in the number of emergency shelter requests. The criminalization tactics are counterproductive, wasting resources of the cities, and decreasing the quality of life of people experiencing homelessness, making it harder to exit homelessness.

As I surveyed people in a park in Washington D.C., I was pleasantly surprised to hear relatively positive reports of individuals’ treatment by the Metropolitan Police Department. Most respondents said they tried to stay out of the way of the MPD, but did not experience any harassment. and understood that the MPD were just performing their job. One man (his name is ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

5/14/2009

Safety Network Email Newsletter

harassment, and understood that the MPD were just performing their job. One man (his name is withheld for confidentiality) explained that the police officers would not generally arrest someone if it was the first interaction, but would respond more harshly on a second encounter if the perpetrator did not respond the first time.

However, complaints that spurred this survey project range from inappropriate citations, such as a ticket for aggressive panhandling when the defendant was not behaving inappropriately, being forced to move when sleeping in public parks, and the confiscation of possessions during sweeps in parks where many homeless reside. The goal of the surveys is to determine if there are any widespread problems with the police or other city workers. If the surveys identify specific patterns of police harassment or other violations of homeless persons' rights, the NLCHP and WLCH plan to engage in advocacy to end those practices.

Goodbye from Molly Neck

As I was completing the final editing on this newsletter I realized that it was the last NCH newsletter I will edit and write for a long time. I am leaving NCH for law school at the end of July. It has been a tremendous honor and privilege to work at NCH. I have learned so much from advocates all across the country and have been truly inspired by all of you as we fight together to end homelessness for all people.

I told a reporter last week that I believe that public opinion is beginning to turn toward a belief that homelessness is unacceptable and not a matter of choice or poor decisions. She asked me why I thought that and I said that more and more people are becoming involved in programs and education campaigns that addresses the systemic causes of homelessness. People in the field are working tirelessly to make a difference, not just with immediate needs but also by advocating for real change. I like to think that NCH has played even a small role in bringing dedicated informed people to the movement.

I will of course continue to play my part in the movement for social justice as I start law school; I am already planning the affordable housing and civil rights cases I will take when I am finally a lawyer. Thank you for your dedication and support. We can and will END Homelessness for all people.

Four easy ways to help:

1. Send your gift to the National Coalition for the Homeless

2201 P. St, NW Washington, DC 20037-1033

2. Call 202-462-4822 ext 16 and speak with Angie Mescall

3. Donate online at www.nationalhomeless.org

4. Host a Bringing It Home Dinner Party. To host a dinner party/event or for more information, please contact Anna Bremner at abremner@blueskycollaborative.com or 617-731-1821

Click [here](#) if you would like to be removed from this list.

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