

NCH . NEWS . . .

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Hello,



This is the July edition of NCH News.

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We have added an action step after each article that you can take to help us end homelessness.

July Contents

1. Rallying to Save Our Homes!
2. Bored to Death: A Group of Teenagers Beat a Homeless Man to Death for Fun
3. National Policy Update
4. Atlanta's Mayor Can't Spare Any Change and She Doesn't Want You to Either
5. Maine's Battle to Protect Their Homeless Population
6. Tobacco Use Among the Homeless Population
7. A Sad Farewell
8. Calendar of Events



Rallying to Save Our Homes!

By Kelly Fawcett, 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 program.

The crowd gained support from passing motorists and pedestrians as they made their way towards the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association to discuss new reforms in the Section 8 low-
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income housing policy.

Section 8 Housing Vouchers allow low-income households to pay reduced rent, 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. However, at this time, only one out of four eligible households are being served and 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, the State and Local Housing Flexibility Act (S 771 and HR 1999). The bill was introduced in Congress by republican representatives and designed by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If passed, the bill would make a number of changes to the Section 8 voucher and public housing programs, such as providing Public Housing Associations broad flexibility in implementing the program, potentially placing thousands of low income tenants at risk.

The Bush Administration has also proposed severe budget to the HUD 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, and rents would no longer be linked to income. In the proposed budget for 2006, \$3 billion cuts in funding to HUD programs would cause over 375,000 tenants under Section 8 to lose their homes.

The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act has three main parts. The first section replaces housing vouchers with block grants that eliminate most federal protections for low income families. With the new proposals, agencies would receive a fixed amount of funding that would be independent of the number of vouchers or voucher costs, leaving the state and local agencies to make up for funding shortfalls.

Such changes would cause housing agencies to serve less people in need or 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 burdens for families with vouchers and residents in public housing. Current Section 8 regulations require that residents spend no more than 30% of their adjusted income on housing, maintaining affordable rents for low income people. This is the federal standard for housing affordability and it allows rents to stay affordable for low-income people.

The National Low Income Housing Association 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. This 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 no longer be able to afford housing.

The final section grants 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.

5/14/2009

NCH News Email Newsletter

Tuesday's rally consisted of a group of about 100 protestors from all over the country, including advocates from Texas, Oregon and California. The main arguments presented against PHADA 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, withdraw PHADA from a tiered rent program, have no time limits or increases in rent for tenants, and to keep all HUD housing affordable.

Tim Kaiser, executive director of PHADA, spoke to the group and 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, which PHADA claims would improve efficiency.

The proposition of the new rent reform made by PHADA occurred because many feel that the current system is unfair and unclear. In the released report, PHADA points out many problems such as how similarly situated residents may pay significantly different rents for virtually identical housing. 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: (1) A tiered rent structure that resembles rent setting policies in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, or (2) A percentage of gross income rent structure that acknowledges differential tax treatment of earned income, pension income, and other unearned income. Kaiser said that details of the new report would be decided on in a meeting with the board of directors this coming September, and refused to take a stand on the possibility that Bush's bill could cause thousands of tenants to become homeless.

Michael Kane, executive director of the National Alliance of HUD Tenants, felt that PHADA's new rent reform would be problematic. It would lower rents for many low-income tenants, but at the expense of raising rents for those in the lowest income brackets, hurting the poorest tenants the most.

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 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 cannot 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 and 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 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
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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.

Bored To Death: A Group of Teenagers Beat a Homeless Man to Death for Fun

By: Natalie Khorochev, NCH Intern University of California at Berkeley, '06

People experiencing homelessness are among the most vulnerable members within a community. Advocates and service workers continually comment that people experiencing homelessness are the population most frequently attacked and subject to acts of abuse as they live unprotected and sleep out on the streets and in parks.

Last year, 105 hate crimes and violent acts against homeless individuals were reported, including 25 deaths^[1]. Troy Ray, executive director of Halifax Urban Ministries in Daytona Beach, said that “the real thing here is as a community we’ve decided there’s no legitimate place for the homeless [and] until there is they will be subject to all kinds of violence”^[2].

Life on the streets is not easy and many times living without the protection and safety of shelter and housing is dangerous. However, many individuals react in ways that blame homeless people for their situation and continue to reinforce stereotypes that view the homeless population as lazy, addicted, dirty, and uneducated.

Lindsay Roberts, executive director of the Volusia/Flagler Coalition for the Homeless, agrees, saying that, “I think there is a shocking lack of awareness among the general public about the causes of homelessness and the notion that homeless [people] are just bums who want to live on the street. They don’t want to be there. They live in fear. They are terribly vulnerable to violence of all kind”^[3].

This was true for 53 year-old Michael Roberts, a homeless man living in Holly Hill, Florida, who was attacked by a group of teenagers and eventually beaten to death on May 25, 2005.

On that date, a group of teenage boys headed to the woods to play the ongoing game they termed “bum bashing,” which consisted of beating homeless people, throwing rocks at them and name calling. Initially Jeffrey Spurgeon, 18, and Christopher Scamahorn, 14, came upon Roberts, whose camp was behind a car wash off Nova Road, and began yelling at him, calling him a “bum” and punching him in the face.

The boys left and returned a short time later and proceeded to kick Roberts and beat him with sticks, coming back a total of three times, beating the man each time and using tree branches to pummel him. Another young man, Justin Stearns, 18, joined the two teens, and was said to have hit Roberts in the face as well as throw a log on his head and chest and jump on it, leaving Roberts in a pool of his own blood.

All three were arrested and charged with first-degree murder with the conspiracy to commit murder. Two other suspects were arrested shortly after for the repeated beating of Roberts: 15-year-old Phi
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Two other suspects were arrested shortly after for the repeated beating of Roberts: 15-year-old Phi Huynh and 15-year-old Warren Messner. Huynh was charged with aggravated assault in relation to the beating and Messner with second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder[4].

An autopsy indicated that Roberts died of blunt-force trauma to the head and body, his ribs were broken, his skull was fractured, and his legs were badly injured. Defensive wounds were found on his hands. Roberts, weighing a little more than 100 pounds, was practically defenseless against his attackers, two of whom weighed more than 200 pounds and were considerably taller.

Several days after the beating, on May 28th, Roberts' blood soaked body was found. His sister Barbara Burns said, "I just think parents need to teach tolerance of other people and to have a little respect for our fellow man. Somewhere along the line we have lost a whole generation"[5]. Richard Roberts, brother to Michael, said, "They didn't have to do what they did. They could have stopped, but they didn't. They came back and they came back and they came back"[6].

This time "bum bashing" proved deadly, taking the life of a man who "was an uncle. He was a son. He was a father. He was a brother. He was a friend," said his niece Dawn Anderson, 35, after the memorial service. "These boys made a mistake in thinking he didn't belong to anybody and nobody would care. Today was proof that he was cared for and loved by many. He was not a statistic"[7].

People experiencing homelessness are often easy targets for this type of violence and their visibility creates situations in which they fall prey to attacks and abuse. Del Hillman, program coordinator for the Homeless Assistance Center in Daytona Beach, said that "there's rarely a day that I don't walk the line and see someone who has been beaten up, whether their mouth is busted open or they have stitches"[8].

Hillman also estimated that there have been at least 100 cases in the past year in the Daytona Beach area[9], but most assaults were not reported to the police because victims want to protect their anonymity. Also, attacks, whether fatal or not, often go unreported because many homeless individuals don't believe law-enforcement agencies take their complaints seriously.

Many do not trust authorities and say that officials become suspicious of their claims and reports because they have a record or criminal past. "The fact that he wasn't wearing a suit and tie doesn't put him [Roberts] in any category less worthy of protection than any other citizen,"[10] said State Attorney John Tanner, adding there was no "rational reason" for the slaying, especially as the boys told a friend, and later investigators, that they beat the man "for fun" and to "have something to do"[11].

Roberts, who did have a court record and had been arrested numerous times on accounts of trespassing, open container violations and disorderly conduct, was arrested in April 2005 at Sunrise Park. When a police officer asked Roberts if he knew he wasn't supposed to be there, Robert said "Yes, but I have nowhere to sleep"[12].

Furthermore, anti-homeless legislation is proposed/enforced to make certain activities illegal, such as sleeping, sitting, and eating, that homeless individuals have no other choice but to perform in public. Such ordinances essentially make living illegal. Testimony to this, Stan Wise, 46, who said he knew Roberts and camped out with him, recently, said, "you sleep with one eye open and you sleep with an open knife, that's how you do it. You have to"[13].

This is the case for many who are continually cited for trespassing and other violations but have nowhere to go or sleep. They are forced to live in public where life continues to prove challenging in the face of such sentiments as, "it doesn't matter they're just bums,"[14] spoken by the group of teenagers that attacked Roberts.

These atrocities and those similar to this attack, continue to reflect the difficulty and danger of living without a permanent home and the circumstances homeless people come across on the streets. Meanwhile, protection for people experiencing homelessness is often overlooked and their presence on city streets is seen as illegitimate and a threat to businesses and communities.

Homeless advocates say they hope the death of Roberts will serve as a wake up call to the community that people like the victim do matter and deserve respect^[15]. The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) will continue its work addressing hate crimes and violence against homeless people, and the need for protection and safety for those who experience homelessness around the country.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Write or call your Representative and ask him/her to support a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study into the nature and scope of hate crimes and violence committed against people experiencing homelessness. Ask your Representative to contact Kenan Keller in Representative's John Conyers office to sign onto the GAO study.

Congressional Switch Board (202) 224-3121

Representative John Conyers (202) 224-5126

[1] *Hate, Violence and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness in 2004*. <http://nationalhomeless.org/hatecrimes>.

[2] Zaffiro, E. (2005, May 31). Man's death doesn't surprise advocates for homeless. *The Daytona Beach News- Journal*.

[3] Circelli, D. (2005, June 29). Study shows crimes against homeless on the rise. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[4] Stapelton, J., & Longa, L. (2005, June 19). Suspects' flip sides conflict with crime. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[5] Circelli, D. (2005, June 29). Study shows crimes against homeless on the rise. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[6] Stapelton, J. (2005, June 10). 3 teens indicted in man's beating death. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[7] Circelli, D. (2005, June 8). "Uncle Mickey" father, son, brother, friend. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[8] Circelli, D., & Longa, L. (2005, June 2). Homeless violence common. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[9] Emmerich, L. (2005, June 1). More arrests possible in slaying. *Orlando Sentinel*

[10] Stapelton, J. (2005, June 10). 3 teens indicted in man's beating death. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[11] Emmerich, L., & Horowitz, E. (2005, June 5). Volusia beating could have been thrill killing. *Orlando Sentinel*

[12] Longa, L. (2005, June 1). Family mourns slain drifter. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*

[13] Circelli, D., & Longa, L. (2005, June 2). Homeless violence common. *The Daytona Beach News Journal*.

[14] Emmerich, L., & Horowitz, E. (2005, June 5). Volusia beating could have been thrill killing. *Orlando Sentinel*

[15] (2005, June 7). Homeless Man's Funeral Draws Family, Friends. <http://www.wesh.com/news/4580013/detail.html?subid=10100244>

National Policy Update

Affordable Housing Fund Amendment:

The fight to create an affordable housing fund from the after tax profits of Fannie Mae and Freddie
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5/14/2009

NCH News Email Newsletter

Mac continues in the house. Recently former HUD Secretary Jack Kemp supported the development of the this important housing resource.

If you have not done so already please call your Representative and ask them to support the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act H.R. 1461 with the Affordable Housing Fund amendment. The switchboard number is (202) 224-3121.

This bill has strong bi-partisan support. If the following Congressmen/women represent you please call them and thank them for their support as well as asking them to continue to support the Affordable Housing Fund amendment.

Michael G. Oxley, 4th-OH *Chair; Jim Leach, 2nd, IA;
Michael Castle, At Large-DE; Peter King, 3rd-NY;
Bob Ney, 18th-OH; Sue W. Kelly, 19th-NY *Vice Chair;
Paul E. Gillmor, 5th-OH; Steven C. LaTourette, 14th-OH;
Judy Biggert, 13th-IL; Christopher Shays, 4th-CT;
Vito Fossella, 13th-NY; Gary G. Miller, 42nd-CA;
Patrick J. Tiberi, 12th-OH; Mark R. Kennedy, 6th-MN;
Katherine Harris, 13th-FL; Rick Renzi, 1st-AZ;
Jim Gerlach, 6th-PA; Randy Neugebauer, 19th-TX;
Mike Fitzpatrick, 8th-PA; Geoff Davis-4th-KY

Appropriations

The House of Representatives passed the Transportation, Treasury, HUD, Judiciary and the District of Columbia Appropriations Bill on June 30th. There were many victories for housing.

Homeless programs were funded at \$1.35 billion, an increase of \$110 million.

Tenant-Based Section 8 was funded at \$15.63 billion, an increase of \$865 million over last year and \$214 below the request. Voucher renewal funding was increased by \$735 million to restore the reduction from last year.

Representatives Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Nydia Velazquez (D-NY), and Barney Frank (D-MA) offered the amendment that increased the Section 8 program by 100 million. The amendment passed by a vote of 225-194, including 30 Republicans.

Project-Based Section 8 was funded as \$5.10 billion, a decrease of \$210 million. This amount will fully fund all contracts and expands the use of inspectors.

Community Development Block Grants were funded at \$4.2 billion.

Atlanta's Mayor Can't Spare Any Change and She Doesn't Want You to Either

 By NCH intern, Hunter Williams, Davidson College NC '06

The criminalization of homelessness is reaching absurd new heights in the city of Atlanta, Georgia where Mayor Shirley Franklin is currently supporting a measure that hopes to prohibit any form of panhandling in a downtown Atlanta district, called the "tourist triangle."

An Atlanta downtown business group, known as Central Atlanta Progress, has pressured the City Council to make illegal what they are dubbing "commercial solicitation." This business group aims to whitewash prominent streets of unsightly poverty in order to attract more vacationers to the "tourist triangle" where the new Georgia Aquarium World of Coke Museum and possibly the ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

“tourist triangle” where the new Georgia Aquarium, World of Coke Museum, and possibly the NASCAR hall of fame will be located.

Currently, it is illegal to beg on private property anywhere in Atlanta if the owner or occupant forbids it. Also it is against the law to panhandle within 15 feet of a public toilet, an automated teller machine, a pay phone, a bus stop or taxi stand, a food stand or push cart, or the entrance of any building.

These laws are fairly standard for the rest of the country, however, the new proposal would maintain most of these restrictions while also making panhandling illegal anywhere in the downtown area and altogether in the city after dark. Most importantly, this law has the possibility to be the most exclusive city ordinance ever passed, making it a serious candidate for a freedom of speech violation.

"Spare some change?" would become an illegal phrase in the "tourist triangle" that extends from Martin Luther King Jr. Drive on the south to Ralph McGill Boulevard on the north, and from Marietta Street on the west to Piedmont Avenue on the east.

The ban could potentially extend its reach into another area several blocks north to North Avenue, west to part of the Georgia World Congress Center and east to the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center. However, in this larger area the city would designate begging zones, similar to the “begging boxes” created by the City of Orlando, on public property to appease the courts.

Despite obvious concerns about free speech and the constitutionality of the ordinance, the city's law department insists it can defend the proposed law because other cities such as Philadelphia, Orlando, and Ft. Lauderdale have similar laws and have avoided legal problems.

The National Coalition for the Homeless' 2004 *Illegal to be Homeless: The Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States* reports that 88% of surveyed cities banned begging in particular public places, 51% banned “aggressive panhandling”, and 29% banned begging city-wide.

Despite this attempt to violate the civil rights of homeless people, key victories have been gained by the local homeless coalition. The Metro Atlanta Taskforce on Homelessness has been joined by local advocates from churches, civil rights organizations and concerned citizens all seeking to protect civil rights and prevent the targeting of the homeless population. Mrs. Anita Beaty, executive director of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless described this dedicated group as creating a “Movement to Redeem the Soul of Atlanta.” The joining of so many groups has proved instrumental in preventing this ordinance from being passed.

When the bill in question was referred to the Public Safety Committee the Metro Atlanta Taskforce organized advocates, including a busload of homeless people, to attend the committee session hearing for five hours. The meeting continued the next day for another five hours, and there have been six subsequent meetings all lasting upwards of five and a half hours.

Each time the chambers have been filled due to the massive turnout of homeless advocates and members of the homeless community. The subcommittee has voted each time to hold the legislation and not take it to full council.

These recent actions have been successful in barring the legislation, but local advocates realize that the measures are simply preventative. Mrs. Beaty said that although this has been “a heartening process” she sees “no end in sight.”

The proposal to ban panhandling in the “tourist triangle” in Atlanta was written at the request of the Democratic Mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin. Mayor Franklin has created The Mayor's
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Homeless Commission to provide public cover for the ordinance removing panhandlers from the “tourist triangle.”

Mayor Franklin hoped to raise \$10 million dollars to renovate a part of the city jail in order to create 250 beds for homeless men. However, due to the fact that Mayor Franklin recently closed a 110 bed facility for women and children, 30 of these beds have now been set aside for women.

In effect, 80 women and children and 30 men have lost their bed for the night. Also, those who do receive a bed in this new shelter will sadly only be allowed to stay for a brief amount of time because of the Mayor’s decision.

The actions of Mayor Franklin have seriously hurt the livelihood of the homeless population in Atlanta, and worse are her attempts to cover up these actions by trying to convey herself as an advocate for issues relating to poverty.

When in fact, it is evident by her actions that she only cares about catering to the local business community who elected her. Even though Mayor Franklin is supposed to be a good Democrat, Anita Beaty describes her as “the worst mayor for homeless people we have ever had.”

Shockingly, TIME Magazine recently named Mayor Shirley Franklin as one of the “5 Best Big-City Mayors” in the country. TIME’s article stated that it consulted with a team of “urban experts” in selecting Mayor Franklin for the list.

However, the only mention of her homelessness legislation was the fact that a new \$5 million homeless shelter was scheduled to open this summer. There was no mention of the fact that this was simply a renovated portion of a jail, and that she has also recently closed a large homeless shelter in the city.

Mayor Franklin has used her public relations skills wisely to convince the citizens of Atlanta that she is helping homeless people. Her proposed new ordinance requires that anyone who is caught panhandling in the designated zone will be “evaluated” by an outreach worker and taken to the newly renovated jail shelter, called the Gateway Center.

This scenario sounds accommodating for homeless people, but in actuality none of the homeless people who are caught panhandling will go to the facility that easily. Rather because they will be held by the arresting officer while they wait for an outreach worker to evaluate their mental health.

The jail aspect of the facility intimidates homeless people and instead of going voluntarily they will more than likely be forcibly removed from the downtown area and be placed in the new facility, or worse sent a few yards away to actual jail for resisting arrest.

For now, this measure has not made it to a vote of the full City Council due to the efforts of local homeless advocates. However, continued vigilance is required in order to ensure that this measure will not be enacted in the future.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Many communities have laws and ordinances that criminalize life-sustaining activities such as sleeping and eating sometimes even leaning against a building is illegal. NCH publishes a criminalization report every year that documents criminalization efforts around the nation as well as including a detailed prohibited conduct chart. [Click Here to view the most recent prohibited conduct chart.](#)

Write a letter to your city council member asking them not criminalize homelessness and to put their energy behind affordable housing and real change not discriminatory laws.

Maine's Battle to Protect Their Homeless Population

By Anna Fogel NCH intern from Harvard University

A current debate in Maine surrounds the expansion of Maine's human rights statute. The legislation was recently expanded to protect people of all sexual orientation, and now there is a discussion of whether to include the homeless population under the statute.

Since 1999 there has been a disturbingly large national rise in the number of hate crimes directed against people experiencing homelessness, and this trend is also reflected in Maine. The Center for Prevention of Hate Violence published a report in January reporting 69 separate incidents of crime against homeless individuals in the state, including violent attacks, vandalism and discrimination.

Many homeless individuals refrain from contacting police, who have complained about difficulties in responding to homeless individuals' complaints, such as the inability to locate the individuals and the lack of credibility of the reports. Without the police, people experiencing homelessness are left out on the streets, completely unprotected and without any safe haven. Legal protection is an imperative for the homeless population's safety, and in upholding their civil rights.

In the May 24th edition of the Portland Press Herald, Edward Erikson wrote an editorial condoning the legal protection of the homeless population, spurring written responses from homeless individuals, homeless advocates and Maine residents. The following disparaging letter, sent from a Portland resident, drew numerous letters of support and sympathy for people experiencing homelessness (see below):

"Think again about having law to protect homeless as a group"

"Anyone who thinks that homeless individuals are entitled to protection under Maine's human rights statue needs to live in my neighborhood for a month ("Maine should protect the homeless," May 24 Maine Voices).

The Oxford Street shelter is located in the center of Bayside in Portland and houses more homeless in one night than anywhere else in the state.

I wake up daily to people defecating and urinating on the lawn across from my house. Drunks passed out on the steps or fighting in the street are regular occurrences.

I had to defend myself against a drunk, homeless man (from away) who tried to break into my house.

Homeless men (from away) have been responsible for some of the most violent sexual crimes in Portland.

Granted, these are just some of the homeless. There are hard-working, decent people who seek shelter at Oxford Street and are deserving of it.

But to protect the homeless as a group by law? I think we residents are the ones needing protection."

Jay York, Portland

The following are three of the seven letters written to the Portland Press Herald on July 5th and 9th in response to Mr. York's letter:

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"Having fought to bring public attention to the problem of hate violence against homeless people, the Preble Street Consumer Advocacy Project wishes to respond to Jay York's June 15 letter.

Is Mr. York suggesting, because he has seen homeless people intoxicated or fighting, that the homeless therefore deserve to be targeted for violent assault?

We think one could find examples of addictions and criminal behavior among any group currently protected under civil rights laws.

Mr. York implies only certain people are deserving of shelter, leading us to wonder if he would like to judge who deserves basic services like shelter that could mean the difference between life and death on the streets.

He seems willing to decide who "deserves" civil rights protection and who does not.

Does he even know about the severe assaults that have been committed against homeless people – including the recent brutal murder of a 100-pound homeless man in Florida by a group of "bum-bashing" teens and, locally, last summer's stabbing of a homeless man while he was sleeping under Casco Bay Bridge?

We are disturbed by Mr. York's nonchalance about the fact that homeless people (including the ones he considers "deserving") have experienced unprovoked, violence attacks just because they are homeless.

We are sympathetic to the problems Mr. York has experienced in our neighborhood but don't think stereotyping and dismissive attitudes toward problems the homeless face will help solve the problems he cites."

-Donna Yellen

Preble Street Consumer Advocacy Project, Portland

"I am a mom, a Christian and a working artist. One child lives in California, one is a pre-med student at Cornell and my youngest is at King Middle School.

At a time in my life, I had to go to a shelter with my children. I was faced with the same stigma as expressed in Jay York's letter (June 15). People didn't see me as a mom stuck financially and trying to find a way. I hid the fact that we were homeless.

Most people I met in the shelter were struggling with the cost of rents.

I can't make Mr. York look at homelessness differently. But I can say wholeheartedly that any homeless person is just as worthy as any other child, woman or man.

The way most homeless people are treated by some "regular people" is with cruelty, hate and ignorance. Do you even know what it is like to have to lay your head down at night in a shelter? There is so much against a person when they become homeless.

Be a neighbor. Stand up for those who have to deal with these misperceptions, abuse and oppression. 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.

When people see the homeless as just people who are in need, then maybe our neighbors would do something positive rather than write letters like Mr. York's."

Dee Clarke, Portland

The disquieting fact is that all too often the homeless in our state are subject to various forms of defamation, harassment, vandalism and assault by those who blame these individuals for their poverty and see them as objects of fear and loathing.

"The recent letter, "Think again about having to protect the homeless as a group," left me with this thought: Think again about not including the homeless as a protected class in the Maine hate crime statute.

Deep structural forces such as eroding work opportunities, lack of affordable housing and the dismantling of the welfare state have produced conditions whereby 3 million Americans are now homeless; tragically, part of the daily struggles for many of these individuals is navigation through hate.

Over the last four years, I have conducted research designed to examine the nature and forms of hate crimes perpetrated against the homeless in Maine, and I have published my results in various journals.

Simply put, the information I have collected about these crimes is both staggering in its volume and haunting in its character.

It is paramount that we more fully acknowledge this victimization as part of the dehumanizing, dangerous conditions endured by the very poor in this nation and take steps to address it.

Hate crimes are signals of discontent, suffering and inequality. Think again about not having these laws."

Sandra Wachholz

Associate Professor
Department of Criminology
University of Southern Maine
Portland

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Letters to the editor can have a strong impact on public debate. As you can see they don't have to be long, full of statistics or political jargon. Simply speak from your heart about the injustice of homelessness and make an impact in your community. Please send copies of any letters that are published to info@nationalhomeless.org

Tobacco Use Among the Homeless Population

By Kelly Fawcett, NCH intern, Oregon State University '06

This article is the second in a series addressing issues surrounding homelessness and tobacco use.

According to the American Public Health Association, tobacco use continues to be the leading preventable cause of death in the United States.[1] There are over 440,000 deaths per year from damage caused by smoking.[2] While rates of smoking in the general population are about 23.3%, people experiencing homelessness have much higher rates of tobacco abuse.

Although collecting accurate statistics from populations like the homeless can be quite difficult, numerous different studies have found that about 85-92% of homeless populations abuse tobacco.[3] These startling high rates create many problems for homeless people.

Individuals among the lowest classes are much more likely to abuse tobacco, the lower the income, the higher the prevalence.[4] As a result of their lack of funds, the homeless often use tobacco in
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the higher the prevalence.[4] As a result of their lack of funds, the homeless often use tobacco in hazardous ways. Homeless people are more likely to buy cheaper cigarettes, or hand rolled cigarettes without a filter, than contain more harmful carcinogens and thus are more detrimental to their health.[5] Homeless people have also been known to pick up used butts from the ground to smoke, or pass the same cigarette around to several different people. While inexpensive, these habits cause the homeless to be more vulnerable to infections and respiratory diseases.[6]

Even when these measures are used to reduce the price of obtaining cigarettes, using tobacco is still a costly habit. A homeless person has little money, and when he has to spend it on feeding his nicotine addiction, there will be little left for food or other basic needs.[7] Even if an individual has the intention to quit smoking, nicotine patches or gums to aid in the process cost more than the homeless can afford.

Living on the streets or in shelters exposes homeless people to numerous health threats. The homeless are often malnourished and face a variety of related health problems. Abusing substances, such as tobacco, further compounds this vulnerability.[8]

Nicotine is one of the most addicting and harmful substances known to man, and long term use can lead to many chronic health problems, such as an increased risk of heart disease, respiratory disease like asthma or bronchitis, stroke, lung cancer, and other diseases.[9] In particular, using hand rolled cigarettes vastly increases the chances of contracting cancer of the mouth, pharynx, and larynx.[10] Abusing substances, such as nicotine, also increases the likelihood that alcohol or other drugs may be abused as well; this only makes the negative health consequences associated with nicotine use more problematic.[11]

In a recent study conducted by the Journal of the American Heart Association, researchers found that cardiovascular disease among homeless populations may be a larger problem than previously accounted for. Middle-aged homeless men were found to be 40 to 50% more likely to die of heart disease than men in the general population.[12] Over fifteen percent of the men that participated in the study already had cardiovascular disease, which is a surprisingly high number considering the average age of men in the study was 30 years old.[13] The study also found that abusing cocaine along with nicotine made the chances of contracting heart disease even higher.

The negative health consequences of smoking are combined with the difficulties the homeless face in accessing health care.[14] This makes the issue of addressing tobacco use among homeless people of utmost concern. The leading causes of death among the homeless include respiratory and infectious diseases, and in a San Francisco study, researchers found that alcohol or drugs were detected in 78% of deaths.[15]

In being concerned with the welfare of the homeless, the National Coalition for the Homeless, with the support of the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty, has begun its own inquiries and research 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.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Free tobacco cessation programs are critical in helping homeless individuals to quite smoking successfully. Call your local health department to inquire about government or privately run cessation programs and the cost of participation. If there are free programs make sure that service providers have the necessary information and are promoting the programs. If there are not free programs, as is the case in Northern Virginia lobby your health department to offer cessation ...bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2005...

programs, as is the case in Northern Virginia lobby your health department to offer cessation programs for free.

FREE TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAMS:

Maryland

Southern Maryland Hospital (301) 877-5700

Suburban Hospital (301) 896-3939

D.C.

The Reflect Maunter Project (202) 332-5536

Providence Hospital (202) 269-7543

Sibley Hospital (202) 537-4500

[1] American Public Health Association 2005

[2] ibid

[3] This range of numbers was collected from the following sources: American Public Health Association 2005, Medical News Today 2005, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control 1999, Health Development Agency 1994.

[4] Health Development Agency 1994

[5] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control 1999

[6] ibid

[7] ibid

[8] American Public Health Association 2005

[9] National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2005

[10] UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control 1999

[11] Medical News Today 2005

[12] ibid

[13] ibid

[14] American Public Health Association 2005

[15] Center for Disease Control 2005

A Sad Farewell

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
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5/14/2009

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lawyer. Thank you for your dedication and support. We can and will END Homelessness for all people.

Sincerely,

Molly Neck

Calendar of Events

July 28th - 31st, 2005:

The annual conference of the North American Street Newspaper Association will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada) on July 28th - 31st. Nearly 100 representatives from across Canada and the United States will be in attendance.

September 6th, 2005:

Nationwide. Bridging the Economic Divide. On Tuesday, September 6th 2005, the day after Labor Day, people will gather at bridges during evening rush hour across the country to support the Universal Living Wage Campaign. For more information on this event please visit www.universallivingwage.org.

Nov. 13-19th, 2005:

Each year, one week before Thanksgiving, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness co-sponsor National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. During this week a number of schools, communities and cities take part in a nationwide effort to bring greater awareness to the problems of hunger and homelessness. For an organizing manual including a variety of events that you can do, please go to www.nationalhomeless.org/awareness.

Dec. 21st, 2005:

National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. Since 1990, NCH has sponsored National Homeless Person's Memorial day on or near the first day of winter (December 21st) to remember our homeless friends who have paid the ultimate price for our nation's failure to address this issue. Learn how you can participate in this year's National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day at www.nationalhomeless.org.

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 15 and speak with Molly Neck
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

