

Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO)

COHHO Policy Priorities for Addressing Homelessness in 2005

1. Ensure quality, accessible shelter for those most at risk

It is imperative that the city provide low barrier/emergency shelter for homeless individuals and those at risk of becoming homeless. While the goal should always be to find supportive permanent housing as quickly as possible, the lack of affordable housing and limited availability in transitional housing programs requires that the city maintain emergency shelter. COHHO urges the city to provide and maintain clean, safe, habitable shelter in all wards of the city, and especially downtown, along with access to services that help individuals transition out of homelessness.

Recommendations:

Randall Shelter

By the start of the hypothermia season on November 1, 2005 the city must open a new shelter near the site of the former Randall Shelter at 65 I Street, SW (Randall Shelter closed in November 2004). The city should develop a detailed description of the allocation of sale funds from the Randall site, which identifies how funds will be earmarked for homeless services.

La Casa Shelter

The city should replace the current trailers used for the La Casa Shelter with a new shelter for men in Columbia Heights near the current Irving Street site. La Casa is the only bilingual shelter in the city, and has been treating men suffering from substance abuse and homelessness in that neighborhood since 1985. Since the city has slated the current La Casa site for new development, it is essential that the city develop a new shelter in Columbia Heights for the men that will be displaced. COHHO recommends that the new shelter contain a minimum of 120 low-barrier/emergency overnight beds, 40 Transitional Rehabilitation Program (TRP) beds, and up to 40 SROs. The overnight beds are the most crucial and must be maintained.

During construction of the new shelter, the city should provide quality transitional shelter in Columbia Heights for the men.

Franklin Shelter

The city should not close the 170-bed Franklin Shelter before opening a similarly sized replacement in the same area (13th and K Streets, NW). This must be a quality, safe, and accessible shelter.

Gales Shelter

By November 1, 2005 the city should develop Gales to include a 150-bed low-barrier shelter for men, which provides access to services to help transition men out of homelessness.

Parcel 38

The city should build a new state-of-the-art women's shelter at 2nd and New Jersey Ave, NW to honor the promise made by former Deputy Mayors Carolyn Graham and Eric Price in June 2001 to develop a new women's shelter on Parcel 38.

2. The Homeless Services Reform Act (HSRA)

Former council member Sandy Allen introduced "The Homeless Services Reform Act of 2003" (HSRA), Bill 15-241, to improve the way homeless services are provided in the District, and allow for innovative approaches to homeless service delivery. The comprehensive legislation defines clients rights and responsibilities, as well as provider standards; establishes an Interagency Council to ensure coordination between government agencies; and calls for monitoring of shelters, and establishes a sanction and grievance process. This bill does not create a right to shelter.

Recommendations:

COHHO calls on the D.C. Council to reintroduce the HSRA in its current form and make passage of this legislation a priority for 2005. Hearings on the legislation should be held before the Human Services Committee at the beginning of the new Council session.

3. Shelter renovations and assessments

The city has not been diligent about keeping an inventory of possible properties that might be available to provide shelter, housing or services to the homeless. In addition, a number of shelters need renovations and need to be made accessible to disabled individuals.

Recommendations:

The Office of Property Management should have an updated inventory of possible properties that could be used to provide services to the homeless by the summer of 2005. In addition, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs should conduct a survey of all current shelters to determine their condition and work with the Department of Human Services to ensure that all facilities are up to code as soon as possible.

Additionally, COHHO calls on the city to:

- Make all shelters and transitional housing facilities wheelchair accessible; and
- Transition residents from trailers to more supportive shelter: residents in the Crummel trailers should be moved to the New York Avenue Shelter and residents at the MLK Trailers should be moved to 801 East Building.

4. Adequate funding in the homeless services budget

Treating homelessness requires many resources so it is important that the D.C. Council and Mayor be dedicated to providing adequate funding in the homeless services budget to meet the growing homeless population in the District.

Recommendations:

The Mayor and D.C. Council should allocate funds to cover the costs of: building new shelters in southwest, downtown and in Columbia Heights to replace the shelters that have recently been closed; ensuring quality staffing and staff-to-resident ratios at hypothermia, low-barrier and emergency shelter; providing adequate family shelter; improving the delivery of mental health and substance abuse treatment to homeless individuals; and improving language access for homeless services. In addition, the Mayor's 10 year plan to end homelessness will require additional sustained funding to achieve its goals.

5. Shelter for families

The District is increasingly sheltering families in congregate-style emergency shelter. This violates District law, presents significant health and safety risks, and is not conducive to transitioning families into permanent housing.

Recommendation:

The Family Focus Group, a subcommittee of COHHO, recommends 100 new units of emergency family shelter to address the urgent need to shelter an average of 300 families who are on the District's waiting list for emergency shelter throughout the year. Additionally, there is a need to replace the 18-unit TASSC Shelter, which closed in October, 2004.