

Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO)
Recommendations to Mayor-Elect Vincent C. Gray
December 14, 2010

Description of focus

The Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations in Washington, D.C. (COHHO) presents the following recommendations to incoming Mayor Vincent C. Gray on preserving and improving services to the homeless population of Washington, D.C. in order to decrease the number of homeless residents in the city. These recommendations were written and compiled by a COHHO Workgroup chaired by Jaymi Furniss with assistance from COHHO Executive Board member Nechama Masliansky.

Services Currently Provided

Currently, the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and provide vital resources to protect D.C.'s most vulnerable residents. Currently, Washington, D.C. provides the following services¹ to at least portions of the homeless population:

Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program

Veterans Administration Supportive Housing Program

Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Emergency, Temporary, and Transitional Shelter

Shelter Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Outreach Program.

In addition, the Interim Disability Assistance Program and the Emergency Rental Assistance Programs, both administered by DHS, have secured many individuals and families in their homes during times of crisis and thereby averted further homelessness.

Recommendations

Many of the following recommendations are for Mayor Gray's continued support of existing services; however, even preservation of these services will not be enough to provide for the growing number of D.C. residents currently in need and those in danger of losing their housing. Therefore, additional recommendations are offered.

1. **1st 100 days: Avoid further cuts in the DHS Homeless Services budget.**

Make shelter and housing for individuals and families a priority in the first 100 days of your mayoral term. As the economy continues to suffer, homeless services are being cut deeper and deeper when D.C. residents are experiencing record high foreclosures and housing losses.

2. **1st 100 days: If pending bill B18-1059 passes, issue an Executive Order or Emergency Regulations clarifying that only family shelter is subject to D.C. residency requirements.**

Ensure that all other services in the Continuum of Care (such as street outreach) be available without service providers' being mandated to demand evidence of residency before they provide such services to people in crisis.

3. **Short and long-term: Preserve the current DHS Permanent Supportive Housing Program.**

Offset certain additional fiscal costs to D.C. government and give hope to D.C. residents experiencing crisis by finding long-term funding for a program that decreases chronic homelessness.

- The Supportive Housing Providers Association found that providing long-term shelter to a resident with mental illness costs \$116 every day, while keeping that same resident in permanent supportive housing costs only \$27 every day (Housing Task Force). By investing in the permanent supportive housing program, DC saves the expense of providing life-long services to the chronically homeless and mentally ill who will not maintain their housing without this program.
- Studies also show that permanent supportive housing for a core group of chronically homeless persons reduces government costs for emergency medical services and incarceration.
- "Studies summarizing the first round of McKinney demonstrations for people with serious mental illness (and often co-occurring substance abuse) show that permanent supportive housing works even for the chronically homeless people targeted by those demonstrations. These programs achieved approximately 80-85% housing retention at 18 months" (Burt, 2006).
- Keep people housed who are currently housed.
- Give hope to vulnerable homeless people who are not yet housed.
- Share resources and maximize use of funding/resources through collaboration among public and private agencies (Burt, 2006).

4. **Short and long-term: Preserve the Interim Disability Assistance program.**

Residents waiting for approval for Supplemental Security Income and other disability services are extremely vulnerable to losing their homes during the application and- all-too-often- appeal processes. By funding this program for the long-term, D.C. prevents disabled residents from being displaced from their homes, saves the city more fiscal responsibility to a resident who has lost a home, and even qualifies for some reimbursement from the federal SSI program (www.breadforthecity.org).

5. **Short and long-term: Preserve the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.**

Prevent people from becoming homeless.

In 2008, approximately \$7.5 million was used by the Emergency Rental Assistance Program to keep children, families and disabled and elderly individuals in their homes during times of crisis. In December 2008, homelessness (mainly for renters of foreclosed homes) had increased, according to a report from the U.S. Conference of Mayors (www.nationalhomeless.org). The budget for ERAP was cut by \$1.3 million in FY11. Without ERAP, homeless numbers will escalate at an unpredictable level. In fact, family homelessness in D.C. increased by 25% between 2008 and 2009, and then by another 13% between 2009 and 2010.

6. **Short and long-term: Fund the Local Rent Supplement Program.**

House people today, and develop housing for extremely low-income people.

7. **Long-term: Stabilize the Housing Production Trust Fund.**

This will enable affordable housing to be built for extremely low-income people.

“In recent years, the Housing Production Trust Fund has become the primary affordable housing development tool in the District” (DeLorenzo, 2007).

D.C. residents need affordable housing. To keep those who are employed living in the District, they must be able to afford a home with the wages they receive from their D.C. jobs.

8. **Short and long-term: Implement the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness’ 2010 Strategic Action Plan, and make rapid exit from shelters a priority.**

As a national example of Best Practices, Hennepin County Homeless Management Information System displays the lowest percent of families served in the community who returned to shelter after being housed, because of their rapid movement of families from shelter into housing (Burt, 2006).

9. **Short and long-term: Concentrate on mediation in Housing Courts.** The Massachusetts Tenancy Preservation Project discovered that 85% of seriously mentally ill tenants who

were facing eviction had their housing preserved by mediation, thus reducing the probability of becoming or returning to homeless by about 33% (Burt, 2006).

Additional Documentation and Best Practices

Martha R. Burt, *Homelessness: Prevention Strategies and Effectiveness* (2006). Burt's analysis of homeless services across the country has provided inspiration and insight to Best Practices in homeless prevention.

Maribeth DeLorenzo and Angie Rodgers, *The District's Housing Production Trust Fund has Developed Thousands of Affordable Units since FY 2001* (2007).

The National Coalition for the Homeless and Bread for the City provided information and data for these recommendations. www.nationalhomeless.org and www.breadforthecity.org.

The Housing Task Force also provides information to the public on homeless services through their website www.housingtaskforce.org.

ⁱ Funding sources include ARRA (stimulus), Congressional grant, annual HUD awards, and local funding.