

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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Vol. X No. 13

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8/25/05

Keep HOPE Alive Act Now to Improve Access to Disability Benefits

Inadequate incomes and severely limited access to health care are important factors that precipitate and prolong homelessness. Two programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), provide both a modest monthly income and an avenue to health care (Medicaid or Medicare) for disabled persons. Regrettably, enrollment in SSI and SSDI is a difficult process, with final determination of eligibility sometimes occurring years after an initial application. For homeless people with disabilities, such delays are foremost among a number of barriers to enrollment¹, and can result in individuals' homelessness becoming "chronic."

An important response to this problem has been the Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation (HOPE) grants provided by SSA to local governments and nonprofits. In various ways, the 40 HOPE grantees facilitate, promote and accelerate the enrollment of eligible homeless persons in SSI and SSDI. Not only does this provide useful resources for resolving individuals' homelessness, but it improves the accuracy, timeliness and efficiency of the disability determination system, freeing up SSA resources for other cases.

The HOPE program has been funded at \$8 million per year for the last three years. Continuation of this small but important program depends on its inclusion in the "reports" of the Congressional committees that fund SSA, which direct SSA to fund particular activities. The House Committee did not include HOPE in its report, but the Senate Appropriations Committee has not yet issued its report.

ACTION:

- Ask Senators on the Appropriations Committee (appropriations.senate.gov) to earmark \$8 million for HOPE grant funding, which will allow the SSA to continue and expand this important program. Ask other Senators to contact Senators Specter (R-PA) and Harkin (D-IA), the Appropriations Subcommittee leaders, in support of the request for \$8 million.

Talking points:

- HOPE grants are a key part of federal, state, and local efforts to end long-term homelessness for people living on the streets. Once homeless persons are receiving a monthly income, service providers are better able to assist them in obtaining

¹ See "Casualties of Complexity: Why Eligible Homeless People Are Not Enrolled in Medicaid" by Patricia Post at <http://www.nhchc.org/Publications/CasualtiesofComplexity.pdf>

permanent housing. One they are receiving health care benefits, conditions underlying their homelessness are more readily and effectively addressed.

- HOPE grants are benefiting the SSA. By making quicker and more accurate decisions, case processing times will be reduced, freeing up SSA resources to devote to other cases.
- The need for HOPE grants far exceeds the current availability of funds. Currently, due to insufficient funding, there have been only 40 grantees out 330 total applications received. Providing additional support would begin to address the unmet need.
- The HOPE grants are spurring other federal agencies to commit resources toward helping disabled homeless persons receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Members of the Senate can be reached at www.senate.gov or through the Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121. For more information, please contact Laurel Weir (lweir@nlchp.org) or Jeremy Rosen (jrosen@voa.org).

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