

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

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Homelessness & Poverty after the Storms Act TODAY to Recover, Reframe, and Rejuvenate the national dialogue

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita exposed underlying social inequities not only along the Gulf Coast but throughout the nation as more than a million area residents joined over three million Americans who tragically experience “regular” homelessness each year. Too briefly, important issues of homelessness and health were propelled to the top of the national agenda before being displaced by the events of the day. Though meaningful social investments are required to reduce and end homelessness, Congress is acting **this week** to trim \$35 billion from important safety-net programs like Medicaid and Food Stamps while pursuing twice that amount in additional tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy – all in the name of disaster relief.

Relief Efforts, Deferred

In the weeks following Katrina, Congress appropriately moved to fund programmatic responses to aid hurricane evacuees. Just shy of passage, many bi-partisan legislative vehicles seemed to stall at the steps of the White House. The Senate agreed to an amendment by Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) providing \$3.5 billion in housing vouchers to 350,000 families displaced by the storm. The next day, Senators Grassley (R-IA) and Baucus (D-MT) of the Finance Committee introduced \$9 billion legislation to extend Medicaid coverage to hurricane victims across the country at no expense to State governments (See September 21 [Mobilizer](#)). These two proposals, offered among a flurry of hurricane relief packages, have a few notable commonalities: their seemingly unquestionable necessity, their strong bipartisan support in the high chamber, and the *steadfast opposition* they’ve met at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Clear and Present Danger for Safety Net Programs

To offset the costs of recovery along the Gulf Coast, Congress is prepared to enact deep spending cuts to important programs during the budget reconciliation process. Legislators are cutting \$35 billion from programs like Medicaid and Food Stamps over the next five years, even while they pursue *new* tax cuts that will cost *twice that amount*. In addition, two previously enacted cuts scheduled for implementation on January 1, 2006, will cost \$27 billion over five years; 97% of the benefits will go to the top 3.7% of households – those with annual incomes above \$200,000. Essential safety net programs upon which hurricane evacuees and other low-income Americans depend must not be sacrificed in the name of disaster relief while both chambers of Congress protect unaffordable tax breaks for upper-income households.

Place Human Need Ahead of Tax Cuts

Poverty, the number of uninsured Americans, food insecurity, and homelessness are all on the rise throughout the United States. Nonetheless, current plans before Congress to siphon valuable

resources from already under-funded programs threaten to prolong these troubling trends. We must **oppose** damaging cuts to important safety net programs, **reject** new tax cuts that disproportionately benefit privileged Americans, and **demand** an appropriate response to national disasters (in the Gulf region and throughout the country) that does not come at the expense of the poor. Urge your elected representatives to place human need ahead of tax cuts.

ACTION:

- **Oppose cuts to safety net programs TODAY:** Call or email your elected officials today with the clear message to vote “no” on the budget reconciliation bill and to protect important safety-net programs that benefit the poor. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. To send a message on this issue directly to the most appropriate legislator, visit http://www.chn.org/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=1001.
- **Reject new tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy:** Urge your elected officials to delay the pursuit of additional tax cuts in order to end and prevent the homelessness of low-income Americans. Encourage your staff, Board, and clients to share their experiences with those who represent them. For additional information on the budget reconciliation bill before Congress, visit the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at <http://www.cbpp.org/>.
- **Demand an appropriate national response to homelessness:** Generate a dialogue on the editorial pages of your local newspaper by responding to articles on Congressional activities or disaster relief efforts. For guidance, read the Council’s official position on recovery and reconstruction efforts, “[Responding to Homelessness in Katrina’s Wake](http://www.nhchc.org/katrinareponsestatement.html)” (<http://www.nhchc.org/katrinareponsestatement.html>) or to use the following talking points in your letters. Please forward a copy of your letter to djohnson@hchmd.org
 - More than one million Americans have been displaced and dispersed. Approximately three million Americans experience homelessness each year as a result of other economic, social, and health-related disasters.
 - FEMA’s primary post-Katrina housing solution has thus far been checks for \$2,358 with which 419,000 families have been instructed to find an apartment for three months. Families often lack transportation or a caseworker, and, if they don’t spend the money on rent, they risk receiving no additional assistance.
 - Congress should pursue common sense ideas for recovery (such as the Sarbanes housing amendment or the Grassley-Baucus Medicaid bill).
 - Massive tax cuts – disproportionately benefiting upper-income households – are taking real dollars away from important programs. Individuals with incomes of over \$1 million are receiving tax cuts this year (from 2001 and 2003 legislation) that total \$103,000 on average.
- **Distribute this *Mobilizer*:** Share this action alert with your staff; distribute it in your waiting room; include it in the packet for your next Board meeting; forward it to coalitions and other organizations with which you work.

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