

# Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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## Home, Sweet Home

*Contact your Congressional representatives during summer recess*

Monday, August 6 marked the beginning of summer recess for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. During this month-long vacation from the Hill, Members return home to their families, constituents, and local offices. While on recess, Members of Congress will continue to receive comprehensive health care benefits (except for Representative Kagen, D-WI, and Senators Brown, D-OH, Edwards, D-NC, and Kerry, D-MA, who have declined benefits until Congress passes health coverage for all Americans) along with a salary of over \$14,000 during the month of August – more than the total amount a minimum wage worker will earn this year. When Congress resumes on September 4, work will continue on key pieces of legislation important to *Mobilizer* readers. The National Council strongly encourages communication with your Congressional Representatives during the summer break about public policies necessary to end homelessness.

### What to look for when recess ends

***The National Housing Trust Fund:*** Another important step toward the establishment of a National Housing Trust Fund was achieved on July 31, when the House Committee on Financial Services passed the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act (H.R. 2895) out of committee with bipartisan support by a vote of 45-23. The bill will provide dedicated sources of funding for the production, preservation, and rehabilitation of 1.5 million units of affordable housing over the next ten years. At least 75% of funds would support extremely low income families earning less than 30% of area median income. H.R. 2895 is expected to come to a floor vote shortly after Congress returns from recess.

***McKinney-Vento Reauthorization:*** Advocates and Congressional leaders alike hope for swift passage of legislation to reauthorize HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs. We expect the Senate Banking Committee to begin consideration of the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act of 2007 (CPEHA) in September by scheduling hearings to discuss amendments to the bill, among them the expansion of HUD's definition of homelessness to include people who are living doubled-up and in hotels/motels. Expanding the HUD definition would align it with those used by other federal agencies such as Health and Human Services and the Department of Education.

***Single Payer National Health Insurance:*** The National Council long has held that a "single payer" universal health care system is the most effective solution to America's health care crisis and the most important step in improving access to care for people experiencing homelessness. H.R. 676, the United States National Health Insurance Act, would establish a publicly-financed and privately-delivered system by expanding Medicare to all Americans through a modest payroll tax. H.R. 676

has been introduced in the House in each of the past three Congresses and continues to gain co-sponsors (reaching 76 so far this year). As the legislation continues to gain momentum in the House, the National Council seeks a champion in the Senate to introduce a companion bill.

**ACTION:**

- **Call your Members of Congress at their local offices this week:** During August recess Members often reach out to constituents to build relationships and identify issues important to the people they represent. You might even invite Member(s) to tour your clinic to facilitate an ongoing relationship. Find out who represents you at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-2131. Call your Member at his or her local office and ask to speak to their scheduler or policy staffer. Explain the type of work you do and ask for a meeting.
- **When you speak with your elected officials or their representatives,** be sure to discuss the priorities below:
  - **Encourage your Representatives to cosponsor the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act (H.R. 2895).** Members are allowed to cosponsor H.R. 2895 up until the committee report is filed, which has not been done yet but could happen as soon as September 5, so Members may sign on to NAHTF before September 4. Inform them that this bill will come to a floor vote in September, and ask for their support.
  - **Urge your Senators to support amending the definition of homelessness in the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act (S. 1518)** to include people who are living doubled up and in hotels/motels. Explain that a more inclusive definition (to match that used by HCH projects) would allow service providers to reach the larger population of people experiencing homelessness.
  - **Ask your Representatives to co-sponsor H.R. 676. Ask your Senators to introduce a companion bill:** Comprehensive health care reform as embodied in H.R. 676 deserves Congressional consideration and a thorough public hearing. Ensure that your Members are aware of this increasingly popular piece of legislation.
- **For more information** contact the National Council's Health Policy Organizer, Adrienne Breidenstine at [abreidenstine@hchmd.org](mailto:abreidenstine@hchmd.org) or at 443-703-1337.

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