

# **The Twentieth Anniversary of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act:**

## **A Consensus Statement on Five Fundamentals**

The July 22, 2007, twentieth anniversary of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act calls for reflection on the persistence of mass homelessness in the United States, for consideration of what is needed to overcome homelessness, and for a new spirit of commitment and determination to eradicate this social evil.

The undersigned national organizations call for reauthorization of McKinney Act programs by the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, and in the forward-looking spirit of the bi-partisan authors of the Act we declare fundamental principles that must animate public policy in a nation without mass homelessness.

Consider:

- On one night in January 2005, at least 744,313 homeless men, women and children were without homes in America.<sup>i</sup> Although all counts of homeless persons are imprecise and controversial, it is unacceptable that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Americans remain homeless each night.
- On an annualized basis, as many as 3.5 million Americans are thought to experience homelessness each year.<sup>ii</sup> Over 1.35 million of these are children.
- Full time work at the current minimum wage does not provide sufficient income to rent a one-bedroom apartment in any county in America.<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2006, in constant dollars, the budget authority for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development was only 49% of what it was in 1978.<sup>ivv</sup>
- The life expectancy of homeless persons is 30 years less than for other Americans, and their rates of illnesses of all kinds are far greater than for others.<sup>vi</sup>
- 142 unprovoked assaults were committed against homeless persons in 2006, with 20 of these resulting in death. 2006 saw more attacks than any of the previous seven years.<sup>vii</sup>
- City ordinances frequently serve as a tool to criminalize homelessness. Of 224 cities surveyed in 2005: 28% prohibit “camping” in particular public places in the city and 16% had citywide prohibitions on “camping”; 27% prohibit sitting/lying in certain public places and 16% prohibit loitering citywide; 43% prohibit begging in particular public places, 45% prohibit aggressive panhandling and 21% have city-wide prohibitions on begging.<sup>viii</sup>
- Nearly 200,000 veterans of the United States armed forces are homeless on any given night, and one-third of homeless men are veterans.<sup>ix</sup> 400,000 veterans will experience homelessness sometime during the course of a year. Both men and women veterans from the current military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan are at risk of becoming homeless upon their return to the US.
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Of all homeless women, 60 percent have been abused by age 12, and 63 percent have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults.<sup>x</sup>

- On an annualized basis, at least 1.7 million youth run away from home due to severe family conflict, abuse or neglect, or are expelled from their homes by a family member.<sup>xi</sup>
- Over 900,000 homeless children and youth were identified and enrolled in public schools in the 2005-2006 school year, a 50% increase from the 2003-2004 school year.<sup>xii</sup> However, the Department of Education count does not include pre-school children, and over 40% of homeless children are under the age of five.<sup>xiii</sup>
- An untold number of homeless people continue to reside in rural areas of the US but remain uncounted and largely unserved.

National nonprofit organizations and a host of state and local organizations have worked vigorously throughout the 20 years of the McKinney Act to end homelessness. The undersigned nonprofit organizations have developed various analyses and strategies to end homelessness, but have agreed on the following Five Fundamentals:

**I. The McKinney-Vento programs should be reauthorized in 2007.** “McKinney-Vento” programs within the US Department of Housing and Urban Development provide approximately \$1.5 billion per year in shelter, services and supportive housing for people who are currently homeless. The last reauthorization of the McKinney programs administered by HUD occurred in 1992. We believe that the HUD McKinney-Vento programs have helped very many homeless persons to survive, to improve their circumstances, and to escape homelessness.

Yet a number of systemic factors result in a constant flood of newly homeless persons replacing those whose status has improved. Mass homelessness is still an emergency.

Our national organizations agree that an explicit national commitment to meet the immediate needs of homeless persons must be expressed through HUD McKinney-Vento reauthorization, and that the Congress must appropriate sufficient resources for the purpose.

Likewise, the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program must be reauthorized, and other targeted homeless programs must be reauthorized, including the Health Care for the Homeless Program and the Programs for Assistance in the Transition from Homelessness (both originally part of the McKinney Act), the Treatment for Homeless Persons Program (in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reauthorization) and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Pending legislation that includes the needs of homeless people in mainstream programs that serve the needs of poor people must be enacted, including the reauthorization of the Head Start Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Food Stamp Act.

We recall that the McKinney Act, at the time of its adoption in 1987, was viewed as only the first step in a national response to homelessness. This bi-partisan legislation providing emergency relief measures was to be followed by measures to prevent

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homelessness and by more systemic solutions to the problem.<sup>xiv</sup> The remaining Fundamentals must be addressed in public policy to make good on that early promise of the McKinney Act.

**II. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased** if homelessness is to be abated. Homelessness is at root a housing problem, driven by the dire shortage of housing units that are affordable for very poor people. The historic withdrawal of federal support for the creation and operation of low-income housing that began in the early 1980s and continues today must be reversed if homelessness is to be ended.

**III. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them.** Debilitating health and social problems often precipitate and are aggravated by homelessness. Existing “safety net” systems are gravely inadequate for homeless people and for those at risk of homelessness; in most states, impoverished and homeless adults are not eligible for Medicaid. Comprehensive health insurance for everyone must be enacted as the equitable basis for financing necessary services, while targeted services for those with special needs and services linked with housing must also be supported. Children and youth need school stability and support if they are to acquire the skills needed to avoid poverty and homelessness as adults.

**IV. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.** Individuals’ responsibility to care for themselves – including paying for housing, health care and other services – can only be fulfilled if their incomes are adequate. People who are able to work should be paid a living wage; that is not now the case for most homeless people who work. People who are disabled and cannot work should receive public support at living wage levels.

**V. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented.** Public systems including education, child welfare, criminal justice, health care and others must not deny services on the basis of one’s housing status. Homeless persons’ civil rights to vote, to frequent public places, to utilize public facilities, and to enjoy equal protection of the law must be supported and advanced.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the McKinney Act, we recognize that much remains to be done to relieve the suffering and financial costs of homelessness.

We believe that a renewed, concerted effort to eradicate mass homelessness is required by our commitment to basic human rights and by our responsibilities to our neighbors.

We call on the governments that represent and act for us all to implement these fundamental principles, and we pledge our own diligence to these ends.

## ENDORSED BY:

AIDS Housing of Washington  
The AIDS Institute  
Catholic Charities USA  
Catholic Health Association of the  
United States  
Catholic Health East  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Covenant House International  
Family Promise  
Give US Your Poor  
The Institute on Homelessness and  
Trauma  
Lutheran Services in America  
Mercy Housing, Inc.  
National AIDS Housing Coalition  
National Alliance to End Homelessness  
National Association for the Education  
of Homeless Children and Youth  
National Association of Community  
Health Centers  
National Center on Family  
Homelessness  
National Coalition for Homeless  
Veterans  
National Coalition for the Homeless  
National Health Care for the Homeless  
Council  
National Law Center on Homelessness  
and Poverty  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
National Network for Youth  
National Policy and Advocacy Council  
on Homelessness  
National WIC Association  
Society for the Psychological Study of  
Social Issues  
USAction  
Volunteers of America

**List as of July 24, 2007. Additional endorsements by National Organizations may be communicated to [jlozier@nhhc.org](mailto:jlozier@nhhc.org).**

<sup>i</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Homelessness Counts*, January 10, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Urban Institute, *A New Look at Homelessness in America*, February 01, 2000

<sup>iii</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Out of Reach*, 2006

<sup>iv</sup> 2008 Administration Budget Historical Tables

<sup>v</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, *Cuts in Federal Housing Assistance Are Undermining Community Plans to End Homelessness*, February 1, 2007

<sup>vi</sup> James. J. O'Connell, MD, *Premature Mortality in Homeless Populations: A Review of the Literature*, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, December 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless, *Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes And Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness*, 2006, February 20, 2007.

<sup>viii</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless, *A Dream Denied*, January 2006.

<sup>ix</sup> National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, *Background and Statistics*, [www.nchv.org/background.cfm](http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm)

<sup>x</sup> Browne, A. & Bassuk, S., "Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2) 261-278, April 1997; Browne, A., "Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64. Spring 1998.

<sup>xi</sup> Hammer, H., Finkelhor, D., & Sedlak, A. (2002). "Runaway/throwaway children: National estimates and characteristics." *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* (NISMART Bulletin Series). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at [www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/196469.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/196469.pdf).

<sup>xiii</sup> National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

<sup>xiii</sup> Burt, Aron, Douglas, et al., *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve: Summary Report-Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1999).

<sup>xiv</sup> The lead House and Senate sponsors explicitly so stated: 133 Cong. Rec. H996-04 (Rep. McKinney); 133 Cong. Rec. S3660-01 (Sen. Gore). Dozens of Members of Congress made similar statements.

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