

# Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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## Housing, More or Less . . . Homelessness & the President's FY09 Housing Budget

*Mobilizer* readers need no reminder of the direct relationship between contemporary homelessness and the steady decline of federally-funded affordable housing. Nor will they be surprised to learn that the Administration's FY 2009 budget proposal fails to reverse this troubling trend. Within the context of increased military spending, the President's proposal seeks significant additional cuts in the low-income housing programs of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If adopted, the budget would only further aggravate the growing phenomenon of homelessness in the United States. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls upon advocates to resist additional HUD budget reductions.

### Where has all the housing gone? (long time passing)

Reductions in federal support for low-income housing began during the Carter Administration and became severe in the Reagan administration in the early 1980's. Mass homelessness soon emerged. Today, there is not a single Congressional district in the United States in which a worker earning the minimum wage can afford a two-bedroom apartment. Even before the recent economic downturn, demand for housing assistance greatly surpassed the supply. And in addition to the 3.5 million Americans who experienced homelessness last year, an ever-increasing number of families lose their homes through foreclosure and risk the realities of homelessness.

In President Bush's budget proposal for the year beginning October 1, 2008, renewals for **Section 8** housing vouchers would be funded at approximately \$14 billion, compared to the \$15.5 billion needed to fund all authorized vouchers. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, this translates into a loss of 100,000 vouchers currently in use nationwide. The proposal would eliminate altogether the **HOPE VI** program, which replaces "severely distressed" public housing with (historically, fewer) new units, thus risking the continued deterioration of existing dilapidated resources. The **Public Housing Operating Fund** would receive a \$100 million increase, to \$4.3 billion, to reflect higher day-to-day expenses. Despite this increase, the appropriation would fund only 83% of the amount necessary to operate public housing.

In an effort to address the growing number of U.S. mortgage foreclosures, the Administration proposes a 20% increase to the **HOME** program, which provides housing funding to states and localities and housing counseling for homeowners facing mortgage foreclosure. Though woefully insufficient, this proposed increase nonetheless is a positive response to the growing mortgage crisis.

## **Reverse the Trend: More Housing, Not Less**

Promising initiatives now before Congress may help to put in place the resources necessary to ensure the human right to safe, decent, and affordable housing.

**A Trust Fund for Housing:** Along with thousands of organizations throughout the country, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council has endorsed the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund (S. 2523). This promising legislation would finance the production, rehabilitation, and preservation of 1.5 million units of affordable housing over the next 10 years. S.2523 seeks to capitalize the Trust Fund with ongoing, permanent, and dedicated sources of revenue chiefly from Government Supported Enterprises (known as “GSE’s” or the “Fannie Mae” and “Freddie Mac” housing programs). A House version of this bill passed with strong bi-partisan support at the end of last year, and the Senate bill, introduced by Senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) among others, has been referred to the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, where it has languished since December.

**The HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act** (H.R. 3524) passed out of the House on January 17 by a vote of 271-130 and was referred to the Senate. Bill language requires *one-for-one replacement* of all public housing units in existence as of January 1, 2005. If enacted, this provision would protect vital public resources and reverse the serious reduction in affordable housing stock that has been a most unfortunate byproduct of the HOPE IV Program’s “modernization” of public housing.

### **ACTION:**

- **Learn more about the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund** on the websites of the National HCH Council, [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org), or the National Low Income Housing Coalition, [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org). If you have not already done so, seek your organization’s endorsement.
- **Contact your Senators.** Urge them to cosponsor S. 2523, the National Affordable Housing Trust Act, and H.R. 3524, the HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act. If your Senator does not sit on the Banking Committee, ask him or her to communicate with their colleagues who serve in this capacity to move both bills to the Senate floor. Find out who represents you at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.
- **Urge State and Local officials to endorse the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Campaign.** Ask your governors, state legislators, mayors, city councils, and other community officials to support passage of the Trust Fund Act.
- **Seek assistance from the National Council.** For a draft sample letter containing specific information about affordable housing in your state or for other information or assistance with your advocacy, please contact the National Council’s Health Policy Organizer, Adrienne Breidenstine, at [abreidenstine@hchmd.org](mailto:abreidenstine@hchmd.org) or 443-703-1337.

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