

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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Help Extend the Reach of the PATH Program

The Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) block grant program was authorized in 1990 to fund outreach, mental health, substance abuse treatment, case management and other appropriate support services to meet the complex needs of homeless people with mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders. In February, Senators Domenici (R-NM) and Kennedy (D-MA) proposed a bill that would modify the PATH program's distribution method to give rural and frontier populations their first ever PATH funding increase. Companion legislation was introduced on June 8 in the House by Representatives Wilson (R-NM), Herseth (D-SD), and Sanders (I-VT). The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls upon all *Mobilizer* readers to take immediate action in support of S. 319 and H.R. 2826 to ensure that PATH is equitable and more effective.

Repairing a structural flaw

The PATH program meets people where they are, providing services in clinics, soup kitchens, streets, parks and elsewhere. Unfortunately, the program doesn't reach far enough into the rural areas of the country where people experiencing homelessness face substantial barriers to care. The problem lies in the formula for the distribution of PATH funds. Based on the urban population of a State or territory compared with the total urban population of the United States, the formula takes into account the need for homeless services in large cities, but it regrettably guarantees perpetual flat funding for jurisdictions lacking a significant urban area. Consequently, twenty-six States and territories have seen no increase in the fourteen years since the program was created. The bipartisan co-sponsors in both chambers of Congress now propose a simple revision of the legislation that would double the minimum allotments to \$600,000 per State and \$100,000 per territory. An identical bill was introduced in the Senate last year (see 9/21/04 *Mobilizer*) but stalled in the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP).

Your action *now* can expedite the passage of S. 319 and H.R. 2826. The proposed changes to the PATH program would be invaluable to providers in the effected areas while also "holding harmless" the states with major urban populations. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council urges *Mobilizer* readers to encourage their Members of Congress to repair this structural flaw.

ACTION:

Your calls and letters are needed to urge the Senate HELP Committee and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce to move quickly on these bills and to support your Member's vote to raise the minimum allocation of PATH funding to \$600,000 for States and \$100,000 for territories.

- **Contact your Members of Congress** to urge their timely approval of S. 319 and H.R. 2826. When contacting a Member of the Senate HELP Committee or the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, ask to speak with his or her staff for that Committee. Explain briefly and clearly how the Committee's actions on the bill will affect the work that you do, your community, and people experiencing homelessness and mental illness. Contact information and Committee membership is available online at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. All Members of Congress can be reached through the Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121.

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