

June 7, 2005

As faith and community based homeless service providers, community developers, advocacy organizations, educators, child advocates, and local governments united by a concern for families and individuals experiencing homelessness in our communities, we are writing to express our deep concern about language in recent HUD appropriations acts that has resulted in a loss of local control and flexibility in the use of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant funds, thereby making it more difficult to prevent and end homelessness in cities and states around the country.

Recent appropriations acts have required HUD to reserve 30 percent or more of limited homeless assistance funds for the production and operation of permanent housing for persons with disabilities. While well intended, this “set-aside” has allowed communities to obtain funding for new programs only by ignoring programs that assist families, youth, and non-disabled single adults. As a result, many communities have had to ignore their most pressing local needs in order to adapt to federal priorities. Communities that have instead put forth proposals that would allow local needs to be met—such as by developing housing for the growing numbers of homeless families with children—have had increasing difficulty accessing federal homeless assistance.

Consequently, when drafting the FY 2006 Transportation, Treasury, HUD (TTHUD) appropriations bill, we urge you not to include language requiring the 30 percent permanent housing set aside. Instead, we ask that language be included which recognizes the importance of providing McKinney-Vento assistance to the full range of vulnerable homeless populations – including families with young children, victims of domestic violence, youth aging out of foster care, and long-term homeless individuals with disabilities.

We agree that affordable permanent housing is a critical element needed to end homelessness. However, as a response to the affordable housing crisis in our nation, we favor increased funding for, and strengthening of, mainstream federal housing programs. While permanent housing should be an eligible use of McKinney-Vento funds, there should not be a rigid 30 percent earmark for it. Instead, the McKinney-Vento programs should be used to provide the broad continuum of housing and supportive services needed to end homelessness.

Homelessness is dramatically increasing in our nation. According to the 2004 U.S. Conference of Mayors report on hunger and homelessness in America, requests for emergency shelter have increased for the fourth straight year and 32 percent of all requests for shelter by families went unmet due to lack of capacity. Given this increase, it is critical that McKinney-Vento programs remain flexible, to provide immediate support and opportunities to people experiencing homelessness and to assist them in transitioning to mainstream housing and social service systems. One size does not fit all

in the fight to end homelessness, and limited homeless assistance funds are best utilized when tailored to specific community needs and priorities.

Sincerely,

Catholic Charities USA

Child Welfare League of America

Horizons for Homeless Children

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials

National Center on Family Homelessness

National Community Development Association

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty

National League of Cities

National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH)

Volunteers of America