

Capitol Hill Day 2015: Federal Policy Priorities to End Homelessness

Americans with the lowest incomes are facing increasingly desperate circumstances, particularly related to housing. Incomes at the bottom of the labor market remain stagnant despite the ongoing recovery, while rents for modest apartments are going up faster. Federal programs that have historically relieved inequality, particularly at HUD, have been scaled back. Congress needs to step up and enact bipartisan solutions, or more homelessness is inevitable. The following are high-priority issues on which Congress is currently working and we can make significant progress during Capitol Hill Day at the 2015 National Conference on Ending Homelessness. Please note that this is not a complete list of the policy initiatives that the Alliance supports.

1. Provide \$2.480 billion in FY 2016 for HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program, including \$40 million for homeless youth initiatives.

The Administration's requested funding level of \$2.480 billion would provide enough funding to maintain existing CoC and ESG capacity, while making important progress toward ending homelessness for families, youth, and people with disabilities. It is important that the final FY 2016 funding level for McKinney provides \$40 million for initiatives to end youth homelessness, including demonstration projects, technical assistance, and a study on the prevalence and needs of homeless youth, as proposed in the Senate bill. These funding levels, along with other HUD resources including new vouchers (see below), would allow us to end chronic homelessness by the end of 2017 and build resources that will be needed to end family and youth homelessness by 2020.

2. Provide sufficient funding in FY 2016 to renew all existing Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers in use, and provide an additional \$512 million to restore the 67,000 vouchers lost due to sequestration, including vouchers for populations experiencing homelessness.

Housing Choice Vouchers help 2.4 million households rent affordable housing in the private market. Many of these households would be homeless if not for the voucher. To get the greatest impact from these vouchers, they should be targeted to vulnerable populations, including families, veterans, and Native Americans experiencing homelessness, victims of domestic and dating violence, and child-welfare involved families and youth aging out of foster care (through the Family Unification Program). By providing more Housing Choice Vouchers, communities will be able to accelerate progress in ending homelessness.

3. Provide \$1.6 billion in FY 2016 for VA's targeted homeless veteran programs, including \$500 million for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program.

SSVF provides cost-effective rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention services, which are quickly becoming the cornerstone in VA's range of interventions. This funding level would further expand SSVF and ensure that homeless veterans have the services they need to stay housed, and is estimated to represent what is needed to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015, and put in place a prevention system that will ensure that there is never another homeless veteran. However, in order to secure this funding level, a small legislative fix is needed to lift a spending cap on the program and ensure that it can be funded at the full \$500 million level needed to bring the program to scale.

4. Provide \$165 million for HHS' Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program, and reauthorize the program including protections for LGBT youth.

The Administration has made a commitment to end youth homelessness by 2020; however, there is still much to be done. Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs need to expand their proven capacity to re-house homeless youth, reconnecting them and preventing exploitation. Congress should provide \$165 million for RHYA in FY 2016. It is also important to reauthorize the RHYA program by passing the bill currently championed by Senators Leahy and Collins (S.262), which includes important protections for LGBT homeless youth.

5. Protect funding for the National Housing Trust Fund.

The National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) was authorized to address the housing needs of extremely low income households. The NHTF is intended to be a permanent program with dedicated sources of funding, not subject to the annual appropriations process. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac began setting aside funds for the NHTF early this year. The program is ready to be implemented, by making funds available to states beginning March 1, 2016. It is critical that Congress block any efforts to defund or prohibit HUD from administering the NHTF.