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2005 NPACH Legislative and Policy Agenda

Expand the HUD Definition of Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Education reports that of children and youth identified as homeless by school districts, only 35% were living in shelters. Another 30% of these children were “doubled-up” (staying temporarily with friends or relatives), and the rest were in motels, cars, campgrounds, or other unstable and unsafe locations. Tragically, families who are “doubled-up” and families staying in motels are not considered homeless by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In contrast, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) definition of homelessness, included in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, recognizes the realities of family homelessness by including doubled-up children, as well as children and youth sheltered in other temporary, inadequate locations. The law thus acknowledges the extent of the housing crisis in this nation, and the lack of emergency and transitional shelter for those who need it. It also recognizes the fact that families and youth living in doubled-up and motel situations often face atrocious living conditions. State Departments of Education and school districts nationwide have been employing the McKinney-Vento definition successfully to help provide school access, stability, and services to homeless children and youth, regardless of where they live. But schools can provide only limited support when HUD-funded services are unavailable. If we are to truly end homelessness, we must ensure that the shelter and housing needs of all America’s families are met. A critical first step is to align the HUD definition of homelessness to the ED definition of homelessness.

Concerns about the “Chronic Homelessness Initiative”

The “chronic homelessness” initiative is a campaign to target federal, state, and local homeless assistance and other resources to people who meet the definition of “chronic homelessness,” defined by HUD as “an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” Thus, by definition, the initiative excludes families, children, non-disable individuals, and youth. As such, this initiative unethically pits needy populations against each other for service dollars. In addition, many communities have witnessed significant growth in the scale and severity of homelessness among families with children, unaccompanied youth, and disabled and non-disabled populations that do not fit neatly into the “chronic homeless” paradigm. Yet these communities are being forced to overlook emerging needs and de-fund critical programs in favor of a narrowly constructed national priority. Members of Congress should oppose language in HUD appropriations bills and other authorizing and appropriations bills that direct resources toward the “chronic homelessness initiative” and instead support measures that assist all persons experiencing homelessness.

Authorization of the Bringing America Home Act

The Bringing America Home Act (BAHA) is a comprehensive bill designed to end homelessness in the United States. It includes housing, health, education and income components. *Housing provisions:* Increases authorization levels of certain HUD & USDA housing programs; establishes a national housing trust fund; Provides 1.5 million Section 8 vouchers for low-income families over ten years; makes permanent housing an eligible use of surplus federal property; authorizes a Mutual Housing demonstration program to provide SRO housing cooperatives for working people experiencing homelessness; Establishes in the Treasury an Emergency Rent Relief Fund; Reauthorizes HUD McKinney-Vento program. *Education provisions:* requires that HUD Continuums of Care coordinate and collaborate with local school district homeless liaisons, and consider the school stability of children when shelter placements are made. *Health provisions:* Reauthorization and strengthening of the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) and Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI) programs; Strengthening of mainstream addiction and mental health services programs including the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant and the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant programs; Strengthening of services provided by the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act

(RWCA) to people experiencing homelessness. *Income provisions:* Day laborer fairness and protection; establishment of a 'Home Build' Program; requires the Social Security Administration to collect data, engage in outreach and expedite application processing of people experiencing homelessness; increases asset limit for SSI and provides presumptive eligibility for people experiencing homelessness; provides greater access to WIA services for people experiencing homelessness.

Creation of a National Housing Trust Fund

NPACH calls on Congress to authorize a National Housing Trust Fund as a revenue source for the production of new housing and preservation or rehabilitation of existing housing that is affordable for poor people. The trust fund should be capitalized with ongoing, permanent and sufficient sources of revenue to meet the goal of 1.5 million new, preserved, or rehabilitated affordable housing units by 2010. The rental housing that is made available through the trust fund should be affordable for households with incomes less than 30 percent of area median income with priority to those earning \$10,700 and below.

Guarantee of Universal Access to Health Care

NPACH calls on Congress to guarantee universal access to comprehensive, quality, affordable health care as a fundamental right through universal health coverage with a single-payer financing mechanism. As a first step, Congress should pass the Health Care Access Resolution directing Congress to enact legislation to guarantee that every person in the United States, regardless of income, age, employment or health status, has access to comprehensive, affordable, quality health care.

FY 2006 Housing Appropriations

Fully fund all housing choice vouchers currently in use, provide additional funding for 150,000 new incremental vouchers, and reject statutory changes that would block grant the Section 8 program or remove the requirement that housing authorities target 75% of vouchers to extremely low income households. Housing vouchers are the largest source of federal housing assistance for low wage earners and people on limited fixed incomes and form a central element in any effective strategy to prevent and end homelessness. The federal voucher program is especially important given the tightening housing squeeze on low-income families at risk of homelessness.

Fully Fund Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities This program, which serves as an important housing and support services resource for people with disabilities, provides funds to acquire, rehabilitate, construct new housing, and subsidize rents. Since 1992 the program has been cut by more than \$100 million and a significant increase is needed to provide much needed immediate housing and support services as well as to help prevent homelessness. The President's FY 2006 request would cut the program by nearly 50% from its current level of \$238 million.

Increase funding for HUD McKinney-Vento- The majority of federal homeless assistance dollars are administered by HUD through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which provides access to emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing, and support services. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors' annual survey, homelessness continued to increase in 2004 and close to one-third of families seeking shelter were turned away for lack of room. In fact, in the last round, fifty-one Continuums of Care went unfunded and 37% of all requests for new program funding was denied, leaving those communities to scramble for resources to meet the shortfall services. At the same time, the demand for emergency services is likely to increase with some communities reporting dramatic surges in homelessness, particularly among families and children. As the gap between wages, income, and the cost of housing – already at an all-time high – continues to grow, more people are likely to experience homelessness and need emergency assistance.

Remove the permanent housing set-aside requirement in HUD McKinney-Vento. Recent appropriation acts have contained provisions that require HUD to reserve at least 30 percent of limited homeless assistance funds for permanent supportive housing. As a result, local Continuums of Care are being forced to ignore the full range of shelter, housing and services needs in order to conform to this mandate. The permanent housing set-aside has resulted in communities being prevented from accessing critically needed funds to provide emergency assistance, support services, and transitional housing, especially for families and children. While permanent housing remains an

important allowable activity within HUD McKinney-Vento program, it should not be given priority over all other allowable activities.

\$385 million for Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA) People living with HIV/AIDS are at great risk of homelessness, and lack of stable housing presents tremendous barriers to adequate health care. The HOPWA program funds comprehensive, community-based HIV-specific housing and helps provide localities with the resources to create appropriate housing strategies (transitional housing, rental assistance, or community residences) for people with HIV/AIDS.

\$300 million for Section 515 Rural Rental Housing. This program administered by the Rural Housing Service (RHS) division of USDA produces new units for the lowest income rural renters. 2.6 million rural residents live in inadequate housing, while one third of rural renters are cost burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing costs. Section 515 once produced over 30,000 new apartments every year, but has suffered sharp funding reductions. In 2003 the program was funded at \$115 million and produced only 826 new units and the President's FY 2006 request is for a mere \$27 million for the program.