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September 2nd, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to urge you and your administration to give urgent attention to the needs of America's most vulnerable population – homeless persons. We are grateful for your leadership in championing the economic stimulus package, and indeed its funds have saved many of the most important safety net programs and the people they serve. As the economy continues to struggle and unemployment remains high, communities around the country are still finding great difficulty in combating homelessness.

Your strong leadership is needed to end this crisis and protect vulnerable individuals and families who are on the verge of losing their housing. Solutions to address this crisis exist and they are centered on affordable housing and healthcare, supportive services for those who need them, and adequate incomes. These solutions recognize that homelessness is more than just a charitable concern, but an issue of basic human rights that affects the overall wellbeing of our country.

As leaders of the movement to end homelessness in America, we call upon you to build on your Administration's work to date by committing to take, and ask the Congress to take, these six key steps to move us significantly towards the goal of ending homelessness in America:

1. Commit to End Homelessness—Now

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has only formally met once during your administration and has yet to have a permanent executive director appointed to lead its activities. The recently enacted HEARTH Act requires the ICH to develop, no later than May 20, 2010, a national plan to end homelessness. We urge you to hold a White House Conference on Homelessness no later than next Spring at which the federal, interagency plan to end homelessness in the United States is presented. The plan should have concrete goals and timelines and should be developed in consultation with homeless advocates and local communities. Additionally, we urge you to put processes in place to ensure oversight and implementation of the plan. The plan should include and address the priorities below:

2. Increase Access to Affordable Housing

The nation requires significant federal investment in affordable housing to prevent and end homelessness in America. Federal funding for affordable housing has been sorely inadequate over the past 30 years, and now is the time to renew our commitment toward the production of new housing opportunities. Priority should be given to expanding a range of affordable housing opportunities to end homelessness for single adults, families, veterans, and youth, including: Section 8, permanent supportive housing, the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Family Unification Program Vouchers, Youth Transitional Housing, prevention and rapid rehousing services, and new, innovative programs.

3. Ensure Adequate Incomes

Ensure that every American has an annual income—whether through wages, public income assistance, tax credits, or a combination thereof—sufficient to obtain and maintain permanent housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the household's income.

4. Expand Access to Affordable Health Services

Ensure that the health care reform legislation guarantees access and eliminates all financial barriers to comprehensive health services – including behavioral health care – for all Americans. This would include expanding Medicaid to all low-income people and allowing reimbursement for proven effective services that help reduce the use of more costly emergency and hospital care (such as medical respite care and supportive services within housing programs).

5. Ensure Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

Strengthen educational access and stability for homeless children and youth, including young children and unaccompanied youth, through the reauthorization and the full funding of the education title of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and expanded access to Head Start and higher education.

6. Protect Homeless People from Discrimination

Homeless persons' civil rights to vote, to frequent public places, to utilize public facilities, and to enjoy equal protection of the law must be supported and advanced.

We urge you to adopt these recommendations as a first step towards ending homelessness in America. A more detailed explanation of the recommendations and their rationale is enclosed. We stand ready to assist you and your staff. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your staff.

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For more information, please contact Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director,
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, at 202-638-2535, x209.

Respectfully,

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Give US Your Poor
Family Promise
National Aids Housing Coalition
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Center on Family Homelessness
National Center for Housing & Child Welfare
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Network for Youth
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
National Low Income Housing Coalition
Western Regional Advocacy Project