

# *Council on Homelessness*



Breanna & Michael



Erica & Jordan

## *2008 Report*



Charlie Crist, Governor  
George H. Sheldon, DCF Secretary

### **Breanna's Story**

Because of economics and housing issues, Breanna and her mom came to Samuel's House after they could not stay with family any longer. Due to a funding freeze on subsidized child care, it is difficult for Breanna's mom to find a job. They are on a waiting list for subsidized housing, but it takes a few years for a vacancy to come up. Samuel's House provides them a safe haven and plenty of food; plus, a building full of people who care what happens to them.

### **Michael's Story**

Homelessness and addiction brought Michael and his mom to Samuel's House. At Samuel's House, Michael's mom had a structured environment to begin recovery, while Michael was in the custody of the Dept of Children and Families. Samuel's House gave her the tools to provide a safe and stable environment for Michael. Now, four-and-a-half years later, they are a thriving family. Michael's mom is still clean and she is a staff member at Samuel's House.

### **Erica and Jordan's Story**

At first when my dad told us when we were going to move I was really excited because I was going to see some of my family. But then we came up homeless. It didn't work out with the family we were supposed to stay with. I was kind of scared. My parents explained what we were going through and told us that God would take care of us. We slept in our car for two days. It was hot and we got lots of mosquito bites. I even had to sleep in a car seat to make enough room for everyone else. We heard from Mom and Dad that we were going to a shelter because we would have a roof over our head, but I thought, "Wow, we used to have it all and now we are going to be living in a shelter."

The shelter was comfortable. We had our own room, but we all had to live in that space. When we were ready to move I didn't want to go at first. I liked the shelter. It was comfortable and I didn't want to leave my friends. Then I was excited to move into an apartment because I would have my own room. My room is pink. I think it is my favorite part of our apartment; I like to go and hang out in there. Now, we are going to have our own house with Habitat for Humanity. My parents are working on the house on the weekends. I can't help build the house, but if I get A's in school that counts toward hours of building. My mom is in school for cosmetology. I am excited when she finishes because she can do fun things with my hair. She can give me purple streaks and a new hair cut. Dad is still working in his same job. He really likes it. I am proud of my parents. I am glad I am not homeless any more."

The Gates family – Mom, Dad and four children -- moved with the promise of housing and a job with family members. When plans to live with family fell through they had to sleep in their van for two days before coming to The Salvation Army Shelter. April and Eric worked hard in the self-sufficiency program. The Salvation Army placed them in a Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program which subsidized their rent for two years in conjunction with the Manatee County and the Manatee County Housing Authority. During that time they worked with the Financial Independence Center to repair their credit and position themselves for home ownership. Currently, April goes to cosmetology school and Eric is continuing to work as a welder trainee and has recently been promoted to quality control. April and Eric have succeeded in completing their goals. They now spend weekends working their sweat equity hours with Habitat for Humanity.

# Council on Homelessness

## 2008 Report



Submitted December 2008

to

Governor Charlie Crist  
Senate President Jeff Atwater  
House Speaker Ray Sansom  
Secretary George H. Sheldon

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## Florida's Council On Homelessness

**Charlie Crist**  
Governor

**George H. Sheldon**  
Secretary

**Elmira Leto**  
Chairperson

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December 2, 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist  
Governor  
PL05 The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Crist:

It is my honor to submit to you the 2008 Report of the Council on Homelessness. This year the Council has focused on raising public awareness on the issue of homelessness. We have received valuable feedback from the public during the public forums at our quarterly meetings.

In response to the charge issued by Secretary Robert Butterworth, the Council and the Office on Homelessness devoted special attention on housing our homeless veterans and other special needs households, like the young adults leaving foster care. Assistance to enable families with children avoid eviction, and remain safe in their homes was also high on the Council's agenda.

The Council is pleased to submit a series of legislative and budget proposals for your consideration. These reflect the priorities set forth for 2008. Increased affordable housing, more homeless prevention resources, and major reforms to the state's mental health system will lay the foundation for reducing homelessness in our great state.

The Council is pleased to continue to work on your behalf for the vulnerable residents of our state who face living on our streets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elmira Leto".

Elmira Leto  
Chairperson

Cc: Secretary George H. Sheldon  
Jerry McDaniel, Office of the Governor  
Bob Barrios, Office of the Governor  
Mary Pat Moore, Office of the Governor  
Council Members

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## Overview

Homelessness continues to be a national and state problem, rooted in the lack of housing options at affordable costs. This is especially true for those households with low incomes, and those falling below the poverty level. Contributing to a person's risk of becoming homeless includes:

- increased costs for housing, including rent, taxes, utilities and insurance;
- mental illness;
- substance abuse and addiction;
- breakup of families due to divorce or domestic violence;
- loss of a job;
- major health care costs, including major illnesses;
- natural disasters;
- lack of life skills;
- the death of a spouse, partner or caretaker;
- lack of a car or public transportation to get to work or to human services needed.

The Council on Homelessness was established to help the state reduce homelessness. Toward that end, the Council develops policy recommendations for submission to the Legislature. In addition, the Council advises the state's Office on Homelessness on its work to coordinate state agencies and their resources to serve the homeless.

In response to the Council's 2007 Report, Secretary Robert Butterworth asked the Council to join with the Department of Children and Families to develop initiatives in 2008 to reduce homelessness in the following areas.

1. Educate the public on homelessness.
2. Increase affordable housing, especially for persons with mental illness, young adults transitioning out of foster care, and our military veterans.
3. Target our veterans, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, with services from the Department of Children and Families.
4. Assist low income individuals and families to enable them to remain in their homes.

In accordance with section 420.622(9), Florida Statutes, the Council is submitting its annual report to the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families.

## Florida's Homeless Situation

According to Florida's local homeless coalitions, there is an estimated homeless population of 59,036 persons on a given day. This is based on counts conducted in January 2008, as well as service provider data from the same time period. These numbers reflect those persons who were sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation, sleeping in an emergency shelter facility, or staying in transitional housing after having been on the street or in an emergency shelter.

The 59,036 figure does not include persons who are "doubled up" or sharing the housing of another person or family, nor does it include those who are staying in motels due to the lack of other adequate housing.

The majority of the homeless population is single adults, making up 63 percent of the persons counted. Households with minor children make up the remaining 34 percent of the homeless persons reported. Children under the age of 18 constituted 19% of the 2008 estimated homeless population.

Based on the 2007 continuum of care plans, the following breakdowns of homeless subpopulations were identified, along with their respective share of the homeless persons who are sheltered.

- Long-term, "chronic homeless" 16%
- Severely mentally ill 17%
- Persons with HIV/AIDS 3%
- Substance abuse 22%
- Military veterans 14%
- Victims of domestic violence 7%
- Unaccompanied youth 4%

In 2008, forty-four percent of the persons reported being homeless for the very first time. This is up from 37% in 2007. For those who reported having been homeless four or more times, they represent 26% of the total. This is down from the 2007 level of 33%. This shift may be reflective of the state's foreclosure situation, with so many households facing the loss of their home. According to a report by the National Coalition for the Homeless, there were 279,325 foreclosure filings in Florida during 2007.<sup>1</sup> This resulted in 195,000 homes lost to foreclosure.

The filings for foreclosure continue at increased levels in 2008. According to one source, RealtyTrac, there were 109,433 properties in Florida where foreclosure filings

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<sup>1</sup> "Foreclosure to Homelessness: The Forgotten Victims of the Subprime Crisis," National Coalition for the Homeless, April 2008.

were reported in the second quarter of 2008.<sup>2</sup> This number is up by nearly 25% over the first quarter of 2008, and up by 181% over the second quarter of 2007.

Other indicators also reflect the growing pressures on lower income families and individuals, who now find themselves at risk of becoming homeless. The Department of Children and Families reports that the number of persons receiving foods stamps is up by over 22% in 2008 over 2007 levels.<sup>3</sup> The Office on Homelessness also reports that families with minor children seeking help with past due rent is up by nearly 27% in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

Social services providers are reporting that it is becoming increasingly difficult to assist individuals in obtaining affordable shelter. Matching people with affordable shelter means that there has to be either available capacity or available resources to subsidize payment, or a mixture of both. Foreclosure on properties used for rentals, the ability of people to afford their rent, and the availability of local, state, and federal dollars for rental subsidies have contributed to this challenge, In Duval County, for example, in the calendar year 2007 and the first quarter of 2008, 49% of all foreclosures were rental units.

These trends are not unique to Florida alone. Across the country, more people are finding it difficult to continue to afford a place of their own.

State government needs to continue its commitment to work with our community agencies to help those in need.

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<sup>2</sup> RealtyTrac, July 25, 2008, Press Release. [www.realtytrac.com](http://www.realtytrac.com)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Children and Families, Quick Facts, September 2008.

July 2007	1,276,531 persons receive food stamps
July 2008	1,560,159 persons receive foods stamps
Increase	283,628 persons (22.2% over 2007 level)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Children and Families, Office on Homelessness, Applications for Emergency Financial Assistance for Housing

July 2007	2,075 families applied
July 2008	2,630 families applied
Increase	555 families (26.7% over 2007 level)



## Council's Actions 2008

### Federal Advocacy

In 2007, the Council submitted a series of recommendations to the Congressional authorizing committees on changes desired by Florida's homeless continuums of care for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The specific changes were outlined in the Council's 2007 Report.

In October 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives passed HR 7211, the "Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2008." This legislation amends and reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Action by the U.S. Senate on passage of this bill is pending.

If passed by the Senate, this legislation would enact many of the provisions recommended by the Council, including:

- Expanding the definition of a homeless person to cover more families who are having to share the housing of others, or are receiving financial aid to stay in motels due to having no other housing.
- Authorize the federal continuum of care housing programs at \$2.2 billion.
- Authorize the annual renewal of the federally assisted permanent housing projects for the homeless from the Section 8 budget account.
- Simplifies the required matching funds requirement.
- Keeps the current Emergency Shelter Grant program as is, with greater flexibility for use to fund homeless prevention aid.
- Authorizes administrative costs to the lead agencies of the local continuums of care to manage the federal homeless housing grants awarded to their continuum area.

In addition to the action on this reauthorization bill, the Council submitted a request to the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development to extend the application deadline for the 2008 Continuum of Care grants. The Council heard from Florida's 28 continuums of care following Tropical Storm Fay that they had all experienced significant delays due to the storm. The Council requested that the application deadline be extended from September 26 to October 15, due to storm impacts in Florida and neighboring states. The action was also sought by the Florida Coalition for the Homeless. In response, the Secretary did in fact grant the extension of the deadline for applications to October 16, 2008.

## Public Awareness

To address the need for greater public awareness on the problem of homelessness, the Council convened a series of public forums in 2008. These forums were held in conjunction with the Council meetings in Ft. Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Orlando and Gainesville. The Council invited all interested persons and organizations to appear and raise concerns for consideration by the Council.

The recurring and major concerns expressed during the forums included the following:

- Increased demand for services due to the downturn in the economy and the rising housing foreclosures.
- Local government officials reported on their struggles to balance their budgets, and continue essential human service programs in light of the state's constitutional amendment limiting property tax revenues.
- The importance of the targeted state homeless grants to fill critical needs in local services.
- The state should not criminalize those with mental illness.
- Homeless is not just a social issue. It causes significant economic costs to the courts, jails, and hospitals.
- The growing decline in affordable housing units, with closures of mobile home parks and conversion of apartments to condominiums adding to the homeless problem.
- There are continuing problems with panhandlers and the homeless carrying on unacceptable behavior in the downtown areas.
- Local programs, like the mental health diversion and empowerment first models, are having positive outcomes for those who are homeless.
- Rural communities face special challenges with homelessness due to the lack of basic shelter facilities and public transportation to access social service agencies.
- There is an unmet need for safe havens and drop-in day centers to serve the homeless during the daytime hours, and provide a facility that accepts anyone who is homeless.

In addition to the public forums, the Council's Education and Training Committee worked with the local coalitions to identify successful public awareness campaigns.

One such campaign was noteworthy. The Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County created a campaign, with the support of the City of Tampa. They created the "Unexpected Faces" of homelessness website at [www.unexpectedfaces.org](http://www.unexpectedfaces.org). The site not only introduces one to the wide variety of persons who experience being homeless, but also promotes public service announcements and other awareness events. The "brown bag" exhibit, which depicts the sole possessions that a street homeless individual can maintain, has been acclaimed for making lasting impacts on the audiences.

The Council and the Office are promoting this education program as a best practice for the other homeless coalitions to replicate. The Office has provided each coalition with other national videos to use in their creation of public service announcements.

The state is also supporting the effort of the National Coalition for the Homeless to create local homeless speakers bureaus around Florida. The Coalition's "Faces of Homelessness" speakers bureaus are supported by AmeriCorps VISTA grants. Ten local programs have been established in Florida, with more being planned. The Office on Homelessness is supporting these local efforts, providing an education curriculum developed for school age children to show the homeless as real people, who may have fallen on hard times, who deserve to be helped and treated with dignity.

#### Increase Affordable Housing for Persons with Mental Illness, Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care, and Military Veterans.

To address this critical need, the Council encouraged the Office to actively promote housing initiatives which could serve these targeted populations. In 2008, there were two new housing opportunities that were actively promoted by the Office to the local homeless provider networks.

The first was a federal grant opportunity to serve homeless veterans. Under the Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$75 million was budgeted to support Section 8 rental vouchers to serve the homeless veterans. The program is linked to the Veterans' Affairs (VA) medical centers, with the VA committing staff to provide case management to the veterans leaving the medical centers who receive the rental assistance subsidy. This program was marketed to link the local homeless coalition, the community's public housing authority and VA health center staff to apply for this supportive housing.

As a result, Florida received awards for seven communities where the major VA health centers are located. A total of 565 homeless veterans will be receiving the Section 8 rental assistance voucher upon their release from the VA medical centers. This is a major step forward to reducing homelessness among Florida's estimated 19,000 homeless veterans, identified by the local homeless coalitions in 2008.

The second affordable housing opportunity that was heavily promoted by the Office and Council this year was targeted to serve persons with special needs. This included the following populations:

- Frail elderly
- Homeless
- Persons with a disability
- Youth aging out of foster care
- Survivors of domestic violence

Florida Housing Finance Corporation made available \$12.6 million to help finance rental housing to serve these special needs households. Twelve projects sought the funding, with seven projects selected. Of the seven projects selected, five are targeted to serve the homeless, and will create 145 new housing units to serve the homeless for at least 30 years. The other two projects will serve youth aging out of foster care. Those projects will serve 84 young adults.

Both of these affordable housing opportunities were new in 2008, and the successful marketing to address the needs of unsheltered homeless individuals and families will create long-term housing solutions to end homelessness.

#### Target Homeless Veterans with Services from the State

Based on this priority for 2008, the Office on Homelessness established a priority in the competitive award of the Emergency Shelter Grant to facilities that would serve homeless veterans. No proposals were submitted for 2008 targeting services to shelter homeless veterans.

The Council received two briefings on the needs and services available for our veterans, who face homelessness. In February, the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs briefed the Council on the range of services that the state offers to our military veterans. In August, the Council met at the Gainesville VA clinic, and learned about the facilities, services and housing available from the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs to serve those vets who become homeless.

The Office on Homelessness also encourages the local homeless continuums of care to seek federal aid to conduct Stand Down events locally. The grants from the U.S. Department of Labor help support community events which bring together a broad array of social service agencies, as well as veteran and employment agencies to meet the needs of those veterans who are homeless. Services provided to the homeless veterans at the event typically include the provision of food and clothing, access to temporary shelter and housing, showers, haircuts, healthcare, legal counseling, issuance of identification cards, information on veteran benefits available, referrals to job training and placement services, and emergency financial assistance. Such stand down events are held each year in nearly every continuum of care area in Florida. The

marketing of the federal grant to support the events allows for greater goods and services to be available at the service day for the veterans.

### Assist Low Income Families with Emergency Aid to Enable Them to Retain Their Housing

The Council recommended in 2007 that the state create a local homeless prevention grant. The intent is to build upon the successful models of the Challenge and Homeless Housing Assistance grants to channel state aid to the local continuums of care. The proposed homeless prevention grant would make state dollars available through the state designated lead agency of the homeless continuum planning to enhance and support local programs to help keep families in their homes and apartments.

In the 2008 session of the Legislature, bills were filed that included authorization for such a prevention grant. While the legislation did not pass, the Council did work to provide guidance to the Office on how such a new grant program could be administered. Based on that guidance, the Office did create a draft of application forms and instructions for possible use in 2008-2009, had the legislation passed.

The Department of Children and Families supports the proposal. The Governor's Office also supported the proposal for 2008 action. The legislation is being requested again by the Department in its 2009 legislative package. More details are provided in the next section on the Council's legislative recommendations.

Given the priority focus on prevention, the Office on Homelessness also reserved the maximum allowable amount of the Emergency Shelter Grant to fund local homeless prevention programs. With 30 percent of this grant earmarked for prevention, nearly \$900,000 was made available to local non-profits to fund emergency aid programs, legal help with foreclosure or eviction processes, and case management to the household in crisis.

Focusing more resources to enable families and individuals to stay in their homes and apartments is a critical strategy to reducing homelessness. Such short term aid is less costly than emergency sheltering. If we can keep that individual or family housed, Florida begins to close the front door into homelessness.

### Ongoing Activities

Each year, the Council works with the local coalitions and continuums of care to guide the Office on Homelessness on the administration of grant programs. In 2008, the Council reviewed the grant application forms and procedures for the Challenge, Homeless Housing Assistance, and local coalition staffing grants. The Council made its recommendations for changes for the 2008-2009 competitive programs. The major changes were due to the delay in the federal continuum of care applications, which required the use of 2007 Continuum of Care Plan data for the grants this year. All of the



recommended changes for the Challenge and Housing programs were implemented by the Office for the 2008-2009 applications.

The Council also reaffirmed its guidance to the Office on the allocation of local coalition staffing grants. With the limited money budgeted for these staffing grants, the Council continued its recommendation to award one coalition staffing grant per continuum of care planning area. The Office on Homelessness followed this recommendation in allocating these grant funds for 2008-2009.

As a part of the Council's strategic plan, enhancing the capacity of Florida's continuums of care is a priority. This is especially critical in ensuring our local continuums remain highly competitive for federal grants. One element of this competitive process is the demonstrated success in establishing discharge planning processes to avoid having persons discharged to our streets from jail, health care, and state systems of care.

The Council's Discharge Planning Committee has worked with the local coalitions to identify successful models for such discharge planning. In 2008, the collection of these best practices, addressing correctional facilities, mental health treatment centers, the state's foster care system, and the health care centers and hospitals, were disseminated to every continuum of care. With the assistance of the Florida Coalition for the Homeless, these models are now readily available on the internet at the Coalition's site at [www.fchonline.org](http://www.fchonline.org). Having these models will ensure that all of Florida's continuums can create their own local plans and agreements. This will help in future federal grant submissions to demonstrate actions taken to avoid homelessness.

## Council's 2008 Recommendations

### Legislative Proposals

#### **1. Reauthorize the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust Fund; and remove the statutory limitations in section 201.15(9) and (10), F.S. on the amount of revenue annually that can be deposited into these two trust funds**

Statutory Cites. State Housing Trust Fund established in section 420.0005, F.S. Local Government Housing Trust Fund established in section 420.9079 F.S.

#### Rationale - Narrative

The problem of homelessness is rooted in the lack of housing that is affordable to all individuals or families. For those with the lowest incomes, the housing options are limited. Based on the homeless continuum of care plans in Florida, there is an unmet need for housing for 24,302 persons who are homeless in 2008.

Statewide, the Florida Housing Coalition estimates that by 2010, the state will need at least 529,141 new affordable housing units. In addition, the 2007 Rental Market Study prepared by the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing found that 558,114 low income households in Florida are paying over 40 percent of their income on rent. This population is at risk of becoming homeless if they encounter any type of economic crisis.

The programs assisted by the state and local government trust funds have a history of success in building quality rental housing units with amenities and tenant service programs. The housing assisted with the state dollar is significantly leveraged with private investment. For every \$1 million in state funding for housing, over \$6.05 million in housing is built or sold.

The need for more low cost housing to serve Florida's growing population is evident. The revenues from the state's surtax on documentary stamp tax are a critical resource for Florida to address this ongoing need.

Based on the current legislative cap on the state and local trust fund revenues, \$244 million is authorized. Based on the funded programs, it is estimated that 15,903 units of housing can be assisted each year, according to the Florida Housing Coalition.

One of the programs assisted under the Local Government Housing Trust Fund is targeted to serve the homeless. The Homeless Housing Assistance Grant program has been assisted with money from this trust fund since 2001. Over eight years, the program has been able to build 2,725 units of housing reserved for occupancy by homeless persons or families. At total of \$41.8 million has

been awarded to assist 96 housing projects around the state. These permanent housing units are helping to reduce the number of individuals who would otherwise be on our streets.

**2. Create a setaside for special needs households/supportive housing units within the State Apartment Incentive Loan program by amending section 420.5087, F.S.**

This proposal would create another setaside within this program, adding to existing setasides for the following tenant groups:

- Commercial fishing workers and farm workers
- Families
- Persons who are homeless
- Elderly persons

The proposal would require that program funds be utilized to produce housing affordable and accessible to extremely low income households with one of the following special needs:

- Persons with a disability, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Persons receiving SSI benefits
- Young adults exiting foster care, up to the age of 22
- Persons with substance abuse problems
- Ex-offenders discharged from jail or prison
- Veterans, and
- Other special need populations or households requiring professional supportive living services in order to maintain their housing or develop independent living skills.

The distribution of the program funds for those with special needs shall be proportional to the need. Extremely low income households shall be defined as households earning 30 percent or less of the area median income for the community.

Supportive housing is affordable independent housing integrated with a comprehensive, individualized service delivery system that allows people to live successfully in the community with stable permanent housing.

Services include the spectrum of non-clinical supports that may be required by a participant in order for that participant to maintain their housing and/or increase their independent living skills. Utilization of services is the choice of each participant.

Supportive housing is the proven solution for stabilizing and housing people with special needs, including individuals and families challenged with homelessness, people with physical or developmental disabilities, frail elderly, victims of violence, people with a mental illness, youth exiting foster care, people living with AIDS, the formerly incarcerated, certain veterans and people overcoming addictions.

Providing supportive housing to all those who need it not only positively impacts the individuals and families served; it also makes significant positive change to the social and economic structures of our state and our communities.

#### Supportive housing is cost effective

Providing services in the community is less expensive than providing them in a facility-setting including those in the criminal justice system. In addition, there are peripheral costs to the criminal justice and healthcare systems when services are only provided in facility-settings.

Most households requiring supportive housing have extremely low incomes. Creating housing which is affordable to persons with such low incomes does require increased subsidy. However, this higher upfront cost is offset by recurring annual savings to service, healthcare and criminal justice systems.

#### Supportive housing provides better outcomes

Services provided in an affordable home of one's own provide better personal outcomes than services provided in a facility-setting.

In addition, supportive housing stabilizes individuals thereby reducing relapse and/or recidivism for the majority of households served.

### **3. Enact the Department of Children and Families proposed Mental Health, Crime Reduction and Treatment Act: Ending the Criminalization of Mental Disorders.**

This legislation is based on recommendations in the 2007 Florida Supreme Court Report, "Constructing a Comprehensive and Competent Criminal Justice/Mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment System."

Florida would invest in a redesigned system of care that:

- Ensures adequate prevention and treatment services in the community;
- Curtails unnecessary involvement of people with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse disorders in the criminal justice system;
- Develops strong collaboration among substance abuse, mental health and other provider agencies to provide integrated delivery of services.

Pilot projects relying on demonstrated best practices will target individuals with mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the justice system. Financing will leverage federal resources, and the incorporation of newly designed performance standards to ensure effective, high quality services by qualified providers. Communities will expand prevention and treatment capacity for juveniles and adults. Funding for mental health services will shift from expensive "deep end" treatment to early prevention, although substantial "deep end" residential capability will have to be maintained.

The Council endorses the legislation to improve the mental health and substance abuse treatment systems to address two major contributing factors for homelessness. Based on information gathered by Florida's local homeless coalitions in 2008, an estimated 28% of the 60,000 homeless persons reported on a given day have a mental illness disability. In addition, another 31.5% have an alcohol or drug abuse disabling condition.

An enhanced system capacity for community care will create new opportunities to get those who are homeless who suffer with mental illness and substance addictions into treatment, and off the streets. Such options are critical to any long term strategy to reduce homelessness, and help the client toward recovery and economic self-sufficiency.

**4. Revise the definition of "homeless" or "homeless person" in section 420.621(4), F.S., to expand the definition to align with the existing federal definition of a "homeless child" for the Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program.**

Revision as Recommended by the Council in 2006

Replace the current definition of "Homeless" in section 420.621(4), F.S., with the following definition.

"Homeless person" refers to an individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes:

- Individuals who are sharing the housing of other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels,



trailer parks, or camping grounds due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.

- Individuals who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Individuals who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar settings; and
- Migratory individuals who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

The term does not refer to any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to state or federal law.

The major change is to add to the state definition:

Those individuals or families who:

- Are sharing the housing of others due to their loss of housing, or economic hardship;
- Are living in motels with public or private subsidies because they have no alternative, adequate housing accommodation.

#### Proposed Change and Rationale

To promote greater consistency and to ensure that families with children and youths who are lacking adequate living accommodations qualify for state homeless assistance, it was proposed that the current statutory definition of "homeless" be amended in section 420.621, F.S., to reflect the broader definitions encompassed in the federal McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth program.

Feedback on this proposal from the local homeless coalitions and service providers was strongly supportive. Reasons cited were:

- The broader term will include all persons who are lacking a permanent, adequate place to live.
- Eliminates the need to apply different standards for eligibility for different programs and services locally

- The proposals would make it easier for families with children, and unaccompanied youth to be served without having to be first on the street, or placed in an emergency shelter
- Recognize the unique problems in rural areas of the state where shelters are non-existent and where the homeless families have no choice but to double up with other households.
- Simplify data collection efforts and avoid multiple estimates of the homeless population.
- Strengthen the relationships between the local homeless service providers and the local school districts by ensuring that a common client is being addressed.

The change to the definition will add to the number of persons identified as homeless, to include those hard to find and identify "doubled up" households relying on the compassion of friends and family to house them during their housing crisis. For most, the option of sharing another's home or apartment is a short term option, due to overcrowding and additional economic stress on the host.

The most likely increase expected is in the number of homeless children identified. Based on the current information, 19% of the homeless persons in 2008 were children under the age of 18, based on the current definition. This equates to almost 11,200 children who are homeless. For comparison, Florida school districts reported 34,376 school age children as homeless, using the broader federal definition. Of those children, 4,691 (14%) were "unaccompanied youth," defined in federal law as not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

**5. The Council reaffirms its 2007 recommendation to authorize a local homeless prevention grant to the local continuums of care. Building upon the successful models of the Challenge Grant and the Homeless Housing Assistance Grant, the proposed new local homeless prevention grant should be authorized with the following components.**

- Local flexibility to allow funds to be used for rent, utility costs, or other expenses creating the household's financial crisis.
- Allow the aid to be provided over a short period of time, as needed to resolve the emergency.
- Allow the state aid to cover case management costs.
- Require the program to track the clients assisted to determine if the household avoided becoming homeless.

- Require an individual case plan for the household to set how much aid will be provided, the mix of state and local funds, and what costs will be covered.
- Allocate the prevention grant by formula to each continuum of care.
- Criteria to be considered in a formula allocation could include cost burdened households (those paying over half of the income on housing), eviction data for the area, or housing stock lost due to disasters.
- Allow for reasonable administrative costs for the local program (up to five percent).
- Encourage linkage of the state's homeless prevention grant to other community housing plans.
- Decrease assistance levels to the household over time to encourage the transition back to independence.

The new program could be funded by the existing appropriation for the Emergency Financial Assistance for Housing Program. This is the only authorized state prevention program, and is managed by the Department of Children and Families, Office on Homelessness. This program operates statewide, with families facing eviction applying directly for state aid. The existing program offers aid of up to \$400 one time in any 12 month period to eligible families. This aid goes directly to the landlord, who agrees to keep the family housed for at least 30 days. The program is funded at \$1,800,000 per year. At this level, the state can help just over 4,000 families a year. Demand for this assistance continues to grow. Applications were up by 27% in July 2008 over the same time in 2007.

The change to a local prevention grant is expected to have the following outcomes.

- Align the existing state resources for prevention with the 28 local homeless continuum of care plans.
- Better leverage the state dollars with existing local prevention assistance resources.
- Speed up the provision of emergency aid to the family by shifting management and decision making to local agencies.
- Reduce the state administrative costs and temporary staffing required each year.
- Cost neutral to the overall state budget by shifting existing appropriations for the state program to the new local prevention grant.

- Allow for more comprehensive aid to be provided to the family, to address more of their critical needs.
- Tracking the success of the prevention aid in keeping the family in their home or apartment.

The local homeless prevention grant is strongly supported by the local homeless coalitions, Florida's continuum of care planning agencies, and the Department of Children and Families

The legislative change was introduced in 2008. The bill, HR241, passed the House of Representatives, but died in Senate messages. The Department of Children and Families has included this issue in its 2009 legislative proposals. The bill language is contained in Exhibit 2 to the Council's report.

For the families facing a housing crisis, this change will give them easier access to the aid they need. Instead of sending an application to Tallahassee for review, they can meet face-to-face with a local case manager at a community agency. The decision will be local, and the processing of a check will be faster than the current program's reliance on requesting and mailing a state warrant from the Comptroller.

**6. Amend section 420.622(4), F.S., to authorize the lead agency receiving a homeless Challenge Grant to use up to 8 percent of the grant award amount for administrative costs in managing the grant.**

Administrative costs would include the professional and clerical staff time directly related to managing the grant, costs for audits, record keeping, reporting, and financial and performance monitoring for subgrant agreements related to agencies funded for homeless services. Administrative costs shall not include the cost of the preparing the grant application.

The Council recommends this change on behalf of the designated lead agencies of the 28 continuums of care, who need to have resources to cover the costs of administering this grant. When the program was created in 2001, the authorizing law did not specify that administrative costs were allowable. The Homeless Housing Assistance Grant program, also created in 2001, does allow the lead agency to use a maximum of 5 percent of the grant for administrative costs.

The Council surveyed the lead agencies to secure cost data on past Challenge Grants awarded. The average cost of grant administration was \$8,318, based on the \$100,000 grant award level. The data reflected cost information submitted by 17 of the 28 lead agencies.

The lead agencies shall have the discretion to budget a level of administrative costs up to the 8 percent maximum. If the continuum desires to maximize the grant for direct services, they may request administrative costs less than the 8 percent.

### Other Legislative Proposals from Prior Years

The Council also reaffirms the following legislative proposals which were submitted in prior years, but have yet to be enacted.

- A. Amend section 42.622(2), Florida Statutes, to update the membership on the Council on Homelessness to:
  - (a) Delete the Florida State Rural Development Council that no longer exists.
  - (b) Add to the Council the Secretary of the Agency for Health Care Administration to fill the member deleted.
  - (c) Correct the name of the Florida Supportive Housing Coalition.
- B. Amend section 420.622(5), Florida Statutes, to authorize that the Homeless Housing Assistance Grant be appropriated as a fixed capital outlay item, consistent with its intent to construct housing for homeless occupancy.
- C. Adopt state legislation that replicates the federal McKinney-Vento Act whereby state surplus property be disposed first to organizations that commit to reuse the property as housing for the homeless.
- D. The Council supports authorizing legislation that would give all counties more authority to create local taxing initiatives provided the revenue generated shall be targeted and restricted to fund local mental health and homeless services.

Details of these four proposals may be found in the Council's 2006 Report.



## Council's 2008 Recommendations

### Budget Issues

1. **Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Florida Campus Veterans' Representative (VET REP ) program \$2,490,618**

The Department is seeking additional staff positions to help returning veterans access the new Educational GI Bill Benefits, including \$62 billion in aid for tuition, fees, books, supplies, student housing, transportation and other education expenses. An accredited veterans representation is requested to provide one position at each of the 28 state and community colleges, and the 11 state universities. These new educational benefits will begin on August 1, 2009. With 158,000 men and women from Florida deployed in Global War on Terrorism who qualify for the new education benefits, the state's colleges will experience an explosion of returning veterans on campus.

The veterans representatives will work to access all federal benefits the returning veterans are entitled to receive. This would include mental health services, housing, counseling, and health care. The outcome is intended to assure that our state's returning veterans are successful in returning to community life, healthy and better educated to be a productive part of our workforce.

The Council recommends this budget request to reduce the potential for these returning veterans becoming homeless.

2. **Department of Veterans' Affairs. FDVA Rent/Mortgage Assistance Program \$5,000,000.**

The Department seeks funding for a new program to help veterans and widows who need help paying their rent or mortgage while awaiting the Veterans' Affairs non-service connected pension benefit. The three to six month delay in obtaining the VA approval of the pension claim can often create a financial crisis that can result in the loss of the veteran's or surviving spouse's home.

The Rent/Mortgage Assistance program would be limited to these non-service connected pension cases, and could only be used once by the veteran or surviving spouse. Up to three months worth of rent or mortgage payments could be provided, and paid directly to the lease holder or mortgage company.

The goal of the program is to help ensure the veteran or widow can keep their home while awaiting the decision on their VA pension claim.

Based on 2007 data, the Department estimates that 1,713 program participants could be expected.

The Council recommends this new program as a homeless prevention strategy, targeting the state's retiring veterans and their surviving spouses.

3. **Department of Children and Families. Technical Assistance to Florida's Continuums of Care. \$168,000**

The Council is requesting funding for an ongoing technical assistance grant to help build the capacity of the local continuum of care planning efforts. An annual budget request of \$168,000 is requested. This would provide grants of \$6,000 to each of the 28 continuum of care planning efforts. This would cover an estimated 40 hours of consultation at an estimated cost of \$150 per hour.

Each continuum would be eligible for the \$6,000 grant, and the continuum would identify their priority training or technical assistance needed. The continuum would also procure the trainer or technical assistance consultant.

Areas of training identified include:

- Help in developing components of the continuum of care plan
- Help to organize or restructure a governing board for the continuum's decision making
- Assistance with the new federal electronic plan and grant application forms and software
- Training on new federal homeless initiatives or demonstration programs, like the rapid re-housing initiative
- Peer-to-peer assistance from other continuums to address common problems or requirements.

This budget recommendation was not finalized in time for inclusion in the Department of Children and Families budget request for FY 2009-2010.

The Council recommends this technical assistance grant program to enhance the capacity of Florida's homeless continuum of care planning efforts. This is seen as critical to maintaining the competitive edge in the national competition for homeless housing grants. Florida has a track record for receiving over \$60 million a year in these federal grants. This funding level far exceeds the state's pro rata share of \$41 million a year.



## Florida's Council On Homelessness

**Charlie Crist**  
*Governor*

**George H. Sheldon**  
*Secretary*

**Elmira Leto**  
*Chairperson*

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### Evaluation of the Executive Director

Under the leadership of Tom Pierce, Executive Director; The Office on Homelessness, which oversees statewide the 28 Continuums of Care, provides an invaluable number of services which would not be as productive in advocating for the homeless without it. The staff is proficient in providing technical assistance among state, local, and private agencies to produce a consolidated program and financial plan for the state's system of homeless programs.

The Council on Homelessness which is under the guidance of Mr. Pierce has been actively addressing issues throughout the year concerning the welfare of those who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness. Mr. Pierce has provided outstanding support to The Council on Homelessness with his vast skill sets, guiding and directing the council to stay on track towards effective outcomes without taking too much control and thereby reducing participation and innovation. His staff has always been well prepared for the meetings and activities of the Council, developing a professional forum for the advancement of issues impacting Florida's homeless citizens in accordance with statutory requirements.

The 2007 Strategic Plan is closely monitored and strategies are being met by sub-committees which meet on a monthly basis via phone conferencing. The strategies chosen were Education, Enhanced Capacity of the Continuum of Care; Housing, Employment, and Health Care. Mr. Pierce is very supportive of the sub-committees in general and provides a wealth of knowledge to help the chairperson and committee members accomplish their task set forth. He is always in attendance and provides the committee with updates for best practices which have been thoroughly researched not only at the state level; but federal. Whenever a request is made to have someone address the committee (whom is an expert in the field of discussion), he makes sure they are available to advise the council for which the topic is to be discussed. His wealth of knowledge is priceless to the council and when he does not have the answer; he will advise the council or sub-committee; by simply stating he must get back to us with that answer; which he does in a timely manner.

It is the opinion of The Council on Homelessness that the evaluation was conducted and a performance rating of 5 has been given to Tom Pierce, Executive Director and that he has fulfilled the statutory duties of the Office according to Florida Statutes 420.622(9).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elmira Leto".

Elmira Leto  
Chairperson

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

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## COUNCIL'S EVALUATION OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Pursuant to section 420.622(9), Florida Statutes, the Council on Homelessness shall evaluate the performance of the executive director of the Office on Homelessness in fulfilling the statutory duties of the Office.

In accordance with section 420.622(3), the Office on Homelessness, pursuant to policies set by the Council and subject to the availability of funding shall:

1. Coordinate among state, local, and private agencies to produce a consolidated program and financial plan for the state's system of homeless programs.
2. Collect, maintain, and make available information concerning persons who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness.
3. Annually evaluate state and local services and resources, and develop a consolidated plan for addressing the needs of the homeless, and those at-risk of homelessness.
4. Compile and disseminate information on public and private sources for programs serving the homeless, including providing technical assistance in applying for such funding.
5. Monitor and provide recommendations for coordinating the activities and programs of local homeless coalitions to promote program effectiveness.
6. Provide technical assistance to establish, maintain, and expand local homeless assistance continuums of care.
7. Assist in the coordination of policies and procedures related to the discharge of persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness from state supported or state regulated mental health institutions.
8. Spearhead outreach efforts to maximize access for the homeless to state and federal programs and resources.
9. Promote a federal policy agenda responsive to the needs of Florida's homeless population.
10. Develop outcome and accountability measures and promote their use to evaluate program effectiveness.
11. Formulate policies and legislative proposals to address the needs of the homeless and coordinate implementation of the state and federal legislative policies.
12. Convene meetings of stakeholders to develop and review policies, services, activities, coordination, and funding efforts to meet the needs of the homeless.
13. Conduct or promote research on the effectiveness of current programs and propose pilot projects aimed at improving services.
14. Investigate ways to improve access to participation in state funding and other programs for faith-based organizations.
15. Designate lead agencies for homeless assistance continuum of care planning.
16. Designate continuums of care catchment areas.
17. Supply a standardized form for written plans for local continuums of care.
18. Administer the Challenge Grants to lead agencies for homeless continuums of care.
19. Administer the Homeless Housing Assistance Grants to lead agencies of local continuums of care.
20. Monitor the Challenge and Homeless Housing Assistance grant funded lead agencies to ensure proper expenditure of funds and compliance with grant conditions.

Council members are invited to submit their comments and input to the Chairperson, Elmira Leto, for her use in drafting an overall evaluation statement. Please note that your comments and input are subject to public records and disclosure.

You may use the following scale, or you may provide written comments, or both.

- 5 Performance far exceeds expectations
- 4 Performance often exceeds expectations
- 3 Performance consistently achieves expectations
- 2 Performance sometimes meets expectations and needs improvement
- 1 Performance is consistently below expectations

Rating: \_\_\_\_\_ Executive Director’s fulfilling the statutory duties of the Office on Homelessness.

Comments on Fulfilling the Statutory Duties of the Office: \_\_\_\_\_

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Member Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print/type)

Member Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send your evaluation input to the Office on Homelessness, Attention: Donna Irby, 1317 Winewood Boulevard, PDHO, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700. The information will be forwarded to the Chairperson.

Respond by **Friday, November 7, 2008.**



Exhibit 1

Council Participants  
2008

Represented by:

Department of Children and Families	Brandon Butterworth
Department of Community Affairs	Paula Lemmo
Department of Health	Glen Davis
Department of Corrections	Alan McManus John Kerski
Department of Veterans' Affairs	Sandy Bowron
Workforce Florida, Inc.	Steve Urquhart
Florida Housing Finance Corporation	Bill Aldinger
Florida Coalition for the Homeless	Rayme Nuckles
Florida Supportive Housing Coalition	Maria Barcus Shannon Nazworth
Florida Association of Counties	Dave Rogoff
Florida Rural Development Council	VACANT
Governor's Appointees	Dr. Angie Su Elmira Leto Arthur Rosenberg Jeffrey McAdams Joanell Greubel
Ex Officio	Jamie Bennett, Council Member, St. Petersburg  Lindsey Berling, Anchorage Children's Home  Officer Jaime Costas, Ft. Lauderdale

Exhibit 2

1                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to Homeless prevention grants;  
3           creating s. 414.161, F.S.; providing for homeless  
4           prevention grants; repealing s. 414.16, F.S.;;  
5           providing for an effective date.

6  
7           Be it Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida

8  
9           Section 1. Section 414.161, Florida Statutes, is created to  
10          read:

11           414.161 Homeless prevention grants.--

12           (1) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.— There is hereby created a  
13 grant program to provide emergency financial assistance to  
14 families facing the loss of their current home due to a  
15 financial or other crisis. The State Office on Homelessness,  
16 with the concurrence of the Council on Homelessness, may accept  
17 and administer moneys appropriated to it to provide homelessness  
18 prevention grants annually to lead agencies for local homeless  
19 assistance continuum of care, as recognized by the State Office  
20 on Homelessness. These moneys shall consist of any sums that  
21 the state may appropriate, as well as money received from  
22 donations, gifts, bequests, or otherwise from any public or  
23 private source that is intended to assist families to prevent  
24 them from becoming homeless.

25           (2) GRANT APPLICATIONS. - Grant applicants shall be ranked  
26 competitively. Preference shall be given to applicants who  
27 leverage additional private funds and public funds, who  
28 demonstrate the effectiveness of their homelessness prevention  
29 programs in keeping families housed, and who demonstrate the  
30 commitment of other assistance and services to address the  
31 family's health, employment, and education needs.

Exhibit 2

32           (3) ELIGIBILITY. - In order to qualify for a grant, a lead  
33 agency must develop and implement a local homeless assistance  
34 continuum of care plan for its designated catchment area. The  
35 homelessness prevention program must be included in the  
36 continuum of care plan.

37           (4) GRANT LIMITS. - The maximum grant amount per lead  
38 agency may not exceed \$300,000. The grant assistance may be  
39 used to pay past due rent or mortgage payments, past due utility  
40 costs, other past due bills creating the family's financial  
41 crisis, provision of case management services, and program  
42 administration costs not to exceed three percent of the grant  
43 award. The homelessness prevention program must develop a case  
44 plan for each family to be assisted setting forth which costs  
45 will be covered and the maximum level of assistance to be  
46 offered.

47           (5) PERFORMANCE. - The lead agency shall be required to  
48 track, monitor and report on the families assisted for at least  
49 12 months following the last assistance provided to the family.  
50 The goal for the homelessness prevention program shall be to  
51 enable at least 85 percent of the families assisted to remain in  
52 their home and avoid becoming homeless during the ensuing year.

53           Section 2. Section 414.16, Florida Statutes, is repealed

54           Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2009

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