



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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March 27, 2007

The House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge you to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs by passing the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2007 (HR 840). This comprehensive bill would give more flexibility—and more resources—to communities across the nation as they continue their efforts to see that everyone has a decent place to live.

Our everyday experience of providing shelter to countless numbers of homeless men, women, and children makes this an urgent appeal. The work of our dioceses, parishes, and Catholic Charities agencies across the nation provides us with a unique perspective on the national disgrace of homelessness. The Catholic Church is a major provider of shelter and services to tens of thousands of people, too many of them families, who are homeless. We help others avoid eviction and obtain housing counseling so they don't end up on the street. The Catholic community provides urgently needed housing to poor families, the elderly, and the disabled in urban, suburban, and rural settings across the country. Unfortunately, the scandal of homelessness exists because the lack of affordable housing persists to the point of crisis.

A new study released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in late February, found 754,000 persons living in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and on the streets on any given night. This is consistent with a study by Homeless Management Information Systems that found 704,000 persons using emergency shelters and transitional housing during a three-month period in 2005. This data indicate there are 300,000 more people than beds in our current homeless assistance system nationwide. The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that in any given year 3.5 million Americans will experience homelessness, about one-third of them children. Beyond the numbers, we know from our own experience that such widespread homelessness, and the broader housing crisis, undermines the life and dignity of too many of our brothers and sisters who lack a place to live.

From our pastoral experience in poor communities, from the work of our dioceses in poor neighborhoods, and the efforts of our parishes with poor people, we know that homelessness and inadequate housing destroy lives, undermine family life, hurt communities, and weaken the social fabric of our nation. The tragic reality of so many people without decent housing is a sign of serious social neglect and moral failure.

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I urge you to support HR 840 as the reauthorization vehicle for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This bill would consolidate the housing assistance programs for homeless people and families. It would provide greater decision making at the local level by establishing community homeless assistance planning boards in geographic areas to lead collaborative planning processes to design, execute, and evaluate programs, policies, and practices to prevent and end homelessness. HR 840 would expand our nation's definition of homelessness to include the numerous families who double up or live in motels. It would also increase emergency shelter and supportive services and provide for more homeless prevention activity and housing solutions.

I ask you to join in a sustained effort to find creative and effective responses to the tragedy and scandal of widespread homelessness. Our nation cannot turn away as people wander our streets seeking a decent place to live.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicholas DiMarzio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee