

**Testimony of  
ANTHONY LOVE  
President/CEO  
Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc.**

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County to testify in support of the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, known as the Coalition, is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate and advocate for the needs of persons who are homeless through support and the coordination of services. Founded in 1982 at the request of then City of Houston Mayor Katherine Whitmire and then Harris County Judge Jon Lindsey, the Coalition was formed to support those entities that provide direct support to people that are homeless through advocacy, education, collaboration and community partnerships.

The Coalition currently serves as the lead coordinator for the local Continuum of Care system. We serve in this role through the support and partnership with the City of Houston and Harris County. This “Collaborative” was developed in 1992. The foundation of this process is based on two principle concepts, implementation and evaluation. Under the guidance and coordinating efforts of the Collaborative Continuum of Care approach, Houston/Harris County’s strategy became a model that HUD used to encourage other jurisdictions to develop. Last year, our local Continuum of Care

provided funding for 27 agencies representing 62 programs/projects that span the spectrum of outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing and of course permanent housing.

In Houston/Harris County, prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there were 12,000-14,000 men, women and children without a place to call home on any given night. Last year approximately 34,000 individuals accessed homeless services in our community. All of these services represent McKinney funded agencies that function as the existing system to exit homelessness in Houston/Harris County. Since 1992, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Funding has been the major source of funding for the majority of homeless service agencies in Houston/Harris County. This funding has provided housing, employment, and other essential services to tens of thousands of individuals who have experienced homelessness in our community.

McKinney-Vento for years has served as the impetus for collaboration and community solutions to ending homelessness. McKinney-Vento has enabled many communities to leverage millions of dollars in private funding and investment while also providing housing opportunities to thousands of low income Americans who otherwise may not be able to afford housing of any sorts. On the other hand, the current bill being considered, would enhance the Acts' ability to serve more people who are at risk of being homeless, realize that any reduction in HUD service dollars will not take place until adequate alternative funding is provided and expand who qualifies as chronically homeless.

The Coalition supports this bill in its entirety, especially the following three items:

**Provision of Funding for Preventing Homelessness:** By allowing communities to use up to 5% of their grant funding to prevent homelessness, a huge barrier to ending homelessness is significantly reduced. This provision truly provides a means of “closing the front door” to homelessness. A continuum is incomplete without prevention as a part of the Collaborative process to create a seamless system of service.

**Involvement of More Federal Agencies:** One agency should not be expected to do it all or bear the burden of ending homelessness in our country. This measure ensures that multiple Federal agencies are involved in the provision of housing, healthcare, human services, employment, and other services as necessary and appropriate. Adjusting the role of the Interagency Council on Homelessness provides a nationally coordinated effort to complement local and state efforts. It also makes the issue of homelessness a national priority and serves as encouragement to local communities that this issue will remain important nationally.

**Broader Definition of Chronically Homeless:** The current definition of chronically homeless is restrictive and disallows much needed services to individuals and families who also demand much from the current homeless assistance system. This new definition is more inclusive than the current definition because it includes families who have an adult head of household with a disabling condition, and people who are homeless other than only those that are sleeping in an emergency homeless shelter or in a place not meant for human habitation. This definition provides a more accurate picture of the individuals and families that are served by these community agencies every day.

Again, the Coalition supports this legislation; however we are concerned about the 25% match requirement and its possible effect on smaller non profits and their ability

to apply for these funds. We are not opposed to this provision, but we are uneasy about the possible consequences and wonder aloud, what type of barrier does this requirement create for smaller agencies that perform at a high level with a smaller budget?

Once again, I thank you for your invitation and this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Coalition. The Coalition supports your efforts to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the critical resources it will provide to communities in their efforts to end homelessness.