



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**GAIL DORFMAN, COUNTY COMMISSIONER
HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION
SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS**

MARCH 30, 2006

Chairman Allard, Senator Reed, and Members of the Committee:

I am Gail Dorfman, County Commissioner from Hennepin County, Minnesota, and the City of Minneapolis. I am honored to address the Committee this afternoon on the reauthorization of McKinney-Vento and the consolidation of HUD programs for the homeless. I first want to remember former Minnesota Congressman Bruce Vento, who throughout his life of public service was dedicated to improving the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Congressman Vento left us too soon, but left behind a legacy of working effectively on behalf of America's homeless, a legacy that will not be forgotten.

I applaud you, Mr. Chair and Senator Reed, for introducing the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act of 2005. Reauthorization of McKinney-Vento is critical if we

are to change the paradigm from managing homelessness to ending homelessness in our communities. Yesterday, we began an intensive one hundred day effort to develop a Blueprint for Ending Homelessness in Minneapolis and Hennepin County. Mr. Mangano joined us as leaders from the public and private sectors, non-profit and philanthropic communities and the homeless came together to commit to ending homelessness over the next ten years. In partnership with the federal government and our state government, we will be successful, and we'll do it before the ten years is up.

In Hennepin County we well remember what it was like before McKinney-Vento. Our shelters were overflowing and we were vouchering families into more than 100 hotel and motel rooms across the Twin Cities every night. Our average shelter stays were three times what they are today and an alarming number of families were cycling in and out of shelter on a regular basis. McKinney-Vento has helped to dramatically improve upon this situation by supporting results-oriented programs. Additionally, through our partnership with the federal government, we have been able to leverage significant amounts of local dollars - \$12.4 million in 2005 alone. Together, we have ended homelessness for thousands of men, women, children, and unaccompanied youth.

Over the past two decades we have learned a great deal in Hennepin County about what does and does not work to end homelessness. We no longer look to shelters as the solution. Instead we focus on preventing people from becoming homeless whenever possible and rapidly re-housing them if they do. It costs ten times more to house and resettle a homeless family than to prevent them from losing their housing in the first

place. Through the support of McKinney-Vento funds, we have established one of the best family homeless prevention models in the country. In Hennepin County, we work hard to keep people in the housing they have. We have learned that prevention is the best and most cost-effective way to end homelessness.

When families do become homeless, we work with them through our Rapid Exit program to quickly place and support them in permanent housing. Rapid Exit is a supportive services program funded by HUD and is listed on HUD's website as a national best practice for its excellent results and low cost. Through Rapid Exit, Hennepin County contracts with highly effective community-based organizations to support both clients and landlords, providing housing stabilization assistance while maximizing mainstream resources. They provide on-going case management to help clients resolve personal issues that are barriers to housing while also building on the strengths of their clients. As one provider told me, "Most homeless people are survivors! They have the innate strength to be successful and we encourage them to use that strength." The case managers also assist landlords in resolving issues that place the client's housing in jeopardy, co-sign leases, and provide financial and legal assistance. Providers serving as intermediaries with private landlords are the single most effective way to recruit and maintain landlords willing to rent to high-barrier tenants.

Our 2005 results far exceeded expectations. During this one-year period, 588 families and 48 chronically homeless adults were placed into housing by Rapid Exit. Of the 588 families, 94% remained out of shelter for at least 12 months. Of the 48 chronically

homeless, 79% remained out of shelter for at least six months. Additionally, 30% of the families and 60% of the individuals increased their incomes during the first six months in their new housing.

Through the expansion of our prevention efforts and the Rapid Exit program, we have also seen dramatic reductions in the average length of stays in our family shelters and the number of parents and children sheltered per year. Between the years of 2000 and 2003, we saw a 47% decrease in length of shelter stays for families, a 42% decrease in the number of parents and children sheltered, and a 70% decrease in the number of shelter beds purchased per year. These kinds of results highlight the importance of innovative, results-oriented practices and our on-going partnership with the federal government through McKinney-Vento.

The numbers are good, but the personal stories are the best, like the single Mom from Illinois who fled from an abusive relationship with her four children and came to our county shelter. She struggled with finding work, caring for her children, and getting them to school on-time. Our Rapid Exit worker helped locate a job and an apartment she could afford. Now ten years later, she owns her own modest home, two of the children have graduated high school and are attending college, and she still calls her case manager every six months to proudly report on her success.

The Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act will bring us another step forward in our quest to end homelessness and provide stable housing for every member of our

community. We support the consolidation of McKinney-Vento programs, the non-competitive renewal of rent/operating subsidies for permanent housing, the 30% permanent set aside for individuals and families with disabilities, and the recognition of the critical importance of prevention. We are, however, concerned with the proposal to curtail certain services after three years. It is critical that services that directly support housing placement, coordination with private landlords, and housing stabilization remain intact. Our Rapid Exit program depends on McKinney-Vento to ensure our continued success – and this, our most effective McKinney-Vento program, would be at risk of termination. Lastly, we support increased flexibility within McKinney-Vento funding streams. The more creative we can be at the local level, the more likely we will be able to end homelessness for people in our communities.

We know what works to end homelessness in our communities. Prevention, rapid exit and supportive housing are key ingredients to keeping people in housing rather than in shelters and on the streets. Reauthorization of McKinney-Vento is critical to our success. I am confident that we will end homelessness in Hennepin County by continuing our strong local, state and federal partnership.