

Introduction

On behalf of the Community Shelter Board (CSB), thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee on the affordable housing needs of homeless and disabled citizens. We hope that this testimony will encourage Congress to make a firm commitment to ending homelessness in our country.

The Community Shelter Board is a nonprofit organization which since 1986, has operated as a true public/private partnership responsible for the collaboration of funding, service delivery and planning to assist persons experiencing a housing crisis in Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio. A seventeen-member board of trustees, largely from the corporate and business community, guides the organization along with a professional staff of twelve employees. This year, the Community Shelter Board will raise, allocate and administer over \$7 million to its 17 partner agencies. The Community Shelter Board receives 18 percent of its support from the private sector. We recently set a record in private sector fundraising by securing over a million dollars in annual operating support and a successful \$1.5 million campaign to develop a new emergency shelter facility. The City of Columbus and the Franklin County Commissioners each contribute \$3,052,165 and \$1,289,711 respectively, along with \$888,382 from the United Way of Central Ohio. Federal funds through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development total \$920,000.

The Community Shelter Board and our partner agencies, along with our funders, have created an infrastructure of programs in Columbus and Franklin County that meets the immediate needs of homeless people, providing a roof over their heads, food, and health care. Our efforts have been successful. We believe it is unacceptable to turn any family, child or adult away from our sheltering system, and continue to work toward this end.

In June 1999, the Community Shelter Board (CSB) and the Greater Columbus community were selected as being one of the best efforts in the nation for addressing homelessness by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). The GAO conducted extensive studies to identify "particularly effective or innovative" homeless assistance programs, and from that research, CSB emerged as one of only four "model" efforts. A special report developed by GAO features Community Shelter Board, along with outstanding homeless assistance programs in Minnesota, Massachusetts and King County, Washington (Seattle). The report praises CSB for playing a central role among service providers and programs in the community, and for ensuring that the whole system works together. CSB also was recognized for its ability to track and measure outcomes of homeless assistance programs countywide.

However, the Franklin County homeless system cannot end homelessness. Why? First, this system does not control the number of people who become homeless because of a host of factors including:

- declines in the availability of affordable housing for low income people,
- growing mismatches between the cost of basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing) and the incomes of extremely poor and low-income people, and
- a lack of core community treatment services for the poor.

Second, while most people who become homeless enter and exit the homeless system quickly, others virtually live in it. For people who are chronically disabled and very poor, emergency shelters have become home.

The Community Shelter Board believed that as a community we were at a critical juncture in dealing with the problem of homelessness. On August 8, 1997, the Community Shelter Board (CSB) received a request from the City of Columbus to develop a plan to address the needs of persons experiencing a housing crisis who may be impacted by development of the Scioto Peninsula (the riverfront corridor in downtown Columbus). With support of the City of Columbus, the United Way of Central Ohio, and the Franklin County Commissioners, CSB established the Scioto Peninsula Relocation Task Force. In October of 1998, the Task Force recommended a plan called "*Rebuilding Lives*" that outlined a better, more targeted system that provides both emergency housing for those in crisis and supportive housing for those with long-term needs. The goal was "that no one is left behind while others move forward." The Rebuilding Lives plan is our community's plan to end homelessness.

We share the assessment of the National Alliance to End Homelessness that so far, much has been accomplished, but the end is not yet in sight. "The pieces necessary to craft a solution to the problem are in place. But we must make changes in order to address the continuing flow into the homeless assistance system, and the backlog that has been created within it. If we do not turn the ship -- if we stay our current course -- homelessness will be with us indefinitely."¹

Homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County

Columbus and Franklin County have steadily gained population over the past several decades. According to the 2000 Census, Columbus was the fifteenth largest city in the United States with a population of 711,470 (11.0% increase since 1990)². Adding in the suburban metropolitan area, Franklin County exceeds one million people. Black and other minority households have also grown and now represent 21% of the Franklin County population.³ There are 116,977 persons living below the poverty level in Franklin County, the vast majority within the City of Columbus.⁴

Homeless affects many Franklin County residents. Since 1989, the Community Shelter Board has maintained a centralized database of all persons who have accessed emergency shelter within Franklin County. To date, more than 100,000 households -- families with children, single men and single women -- have received shelter.

A random telephone survey of 500 Franklin County residents in 1999 found that ten percent of area residents have stayed in a homeless shelter or been without housing. Eighteen percent had a family member who had experienced homelessness.⁵

Current trends:

The annual number of families sheltered has plummeted from a high of 1,168 households in 1995 to a low of 612 households in 1999. This represented a 47% decrease from 1995 to 1999. This decrease was achieved because we dramatically increased homeless prevention services. However, the average length of stay in shelter has increased to 71 days.⁶ The increase is partially a factor related to serving more families through the prevention initiative, thus avoiding a shelter stay for families who have a slightly better economic condition. The increase in length of stay is also attributable to the loss of affordable housing and the increasing sophistication of property managers in screening out prospective tenants with credit problems.

It is important to realize, for reasons not yet fully understood, but perhaps attributable to the changing economy, the number of families seeking shelter increased by 20% in 2000 compared to 1999. The typical family receiving shelter from a Community Shelter Board

partner agency during 2000 was a single mother approximately 31 years of age with 2 children. Roughly 36 percent of the children were under the age of five and 18 percent of the families reported their primary income source as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The number of families who reported income from employment increased to 33 percent. Approximately 57 percent of the families moved from CSB shelters to a successful housing placement. At intake the families listed eviction, relocation, and relationship problems as the most common contributing factors to their housing crisis.⁷

The number of single women who are homeless has remained constant since 1995 while the number of single men has decreased by 3.5 percent. In 2000, 931 single women and 3,869 single men experienced homelessness. The majority of the single adult individuals served were between the age of 31-45. Of the total, 81 percent of the single adults were men and 19 percent were women. About 46 percent have a high school degree or the equivalent and 21 percent have some college education or a college degree. Just fewer than 25 percent of these adults were working full or part-time at intake. Single adults listed insufficient wages or benefits, drinking/drug problems, and relationship problems as the most common contributing factors to their housing crisis.⁸

Our community's existing shelter system works best for 85 percent of homeless persons who face a *short-term* problem, providing them with a place to stay and food to eat until they are able to support themselves. The remaining 15 percent have more difficult, *long-term* problems that the current system does not effectively address. This 15 percent of the population ineffectively and inefficiently uses more than half of the shelter resources.⁹

Table 1. Types of Homeless men in Franklin County, 1994-1996¹⁰

	Transitional Homeless	Episodic Homeless	Chronic Homeless
Average length of system stay	24.2 days	119 days	500 days
Average number of homeless episodes	1.4	5.3	4.0
Number of homeless men (unduplicated)	6,752	1,033	159
Percent of all homeless men served	85%	13%	2%
Percent of all units of shelter service used ⁽¹⁾	44%	32%	24%

(1) A shelter unit of service is equal to one person sheltered for one night

Columbus and Franklin County's Continuum of Care

The Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio, Continuum of Care system has been developed through extensive collaboration among public, private and non-profit organizations concerned with programs for homeless persons. The lead organization for this process is the Community Shelter Board. An array of groups and individuals are actively involved in local Continuum of Care planning and program implementation by serving on coordinating and advisory groups. All components of a Continuum of Care

system are present in Columbus and Franklin County. These include homelessness prevention, outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and supportive services. A priority of our community is to direct resources to expand and strengthen permanent housing options and services for the hardest-to-serve populations including chronically homeless individuals, families, and youth.¹¹

Our community's continuum of care is extensive and comprehensive -- more than 50 non-profit and public organizations are involved.

Innovative Features in Franklin County:

One innovation in our community is a comprehensive **Homelessness Prevention Program** to serve individuals and families who are in imminent risk of homelessness with relocation assistance, case-management, service linkage, budget counseling and mediation services. The Prevention Program also provides short-term financial assistance in the form of rent, mortgage, and utility assistance if necessary to resolve their housing crisis. The program successfully reduces the number of households entering mainstream emergency shelter.

The target population for the Prevention Program is low-income families and individuals with stable incomes who are at risk of becoming homeless due to an eviction notice, code enforcement notice to vacate, utility past due/shutoff notice, and overcrowded living conditions. Households access homeless prevention via telephone where an initial interview is conducted to examine potential options and gather basic information.

The Prevention Program, implemented by Lutheran Social Services, coordinates with other community agencies in order to provide services to families and individuals in need of prevention services. The primary collaborations are with satellite offices at Central Community Center, Columbus Area, Inc. (a community action agency), Gladden Community House, Columbus Legal Aid Society and Godman Guild Association. The primary collaborating funders are the City CDBG, County CDBG, Ohio Housing Trust Fund and CSB's private resources.

As a result of the Prevention Program, the Community Shelter Board is able to provide proven and cost-effective housing alternatives to prevent homelessness for 1,100 households annually and thereby decrease the demand on our community's sheltering system.

Based on the *Rebuilding Lives* plan, an **improved emergency shelter safety net** will meet the needs of people who have short-term needs and are "transitionally" homeless. The *transitionally homeless* population consists of those people who generally enter the shelter system for only one short stay. They have usually lost their housing due to a catastrophic event. In most cases, transitionally homeless people stay in shelter for an average of one month and do not return to homelessness after they leave shelter. The shelters also serve as an entry point to supportive housing for the 15 percent of the adults with long-term needs. These improvements include:

- Three new men's shelters will be opening this year to replace the outdated shelters concentrated in a downtown neighborhood. The new facilities, along with existing facilities, assure better geographic dispersion of emergency shelters. One is a specialized program for publicly inebriated individuals that has exceeded all expectations by linking more than one-third of the men and two-thirds of the women served to treatment programs.

- All CSB emergency shelters passed the Shelter Certification Standards, which include Good Neighbor Agreements. The latter are written agreements that are signed with neighbors of the projects. The agreements stipulate communication, expectations, and safety issues.
- A new family shelter recently opened in an older suburban community that provides individual apartments for each family instead of the prior congregate shelter in a former convent. With the exception of the front-door shelter, all family shelters now operate in apartment settings offering greater privacy and autonomy for families, as well as the ability to serve diverse family compositions.
- Resource Centers located in each shelter are equipped with computers, Internet access, telephones with voice messaging capabilities and current information about job and housing leads. The Resource Centers provide an efficient way to meet resident needs.

The **supportive housing** component of the Rebuilding Lives plan provides permanent, affordable housing that includes counseling and on-site social services for individuals who have long-term needs. The goal is to develop 800 units of supportive housing over a five-year period, including assisted living for persons with disabilities, treatment housing, and mixed population housing. Supportive housing is being developed throughout our community and will help to revitalize and develop downtown and neighborhoods.

Since the *Rebuilding Lives* plan implementation started in July 1999, more than 90 units of supportive housing are operational and 117 more units will be online by the end of the year. Another 120 units are in the early development process. This represents 96 percent of the two-year goal for supportive housing development.

In order to accommodate the needs of homeless families, the **Family Housing Collaborative** was established as an effective alternative to traditional homeless facility-based shelter services. The Family Housing Collaborative houses some of the sheltering system's neediest families in a non-facility-based program that has a housing success rate of greater than 95%. Since the inception of the program in 1988, no participating families have returned to shelter after being housed by the Family Housing Collaborative.

The Family Housing Collaborative (FHC) began as a Direct Housing Demonstration program modeled after Beyond Shelter, a Los Angeles program. Direct housing returned homeless families to independent living as soon as possible, with transitional support provided after the family was placed in permanent rental housing. In July 1999, the Direct Housing Program expanded into the FHC to implement the direct housing concepts on a community-wide basis.

The goal of the Family Housing Collaborative is to quickly place a homeless family in a permanent apartment. Services include housing search assistance to help a family locate housing and providing assistance with deposit, several months' rent, and utility arrearages. The services continue until the family is stabilized in their new home.

Through the Family Housing Collaborative, the Community Shelter Board is working with its partner agencies to ensure that resources are available to quickly move families out of shelters and into homes. As a result, our community is able to provide services to homeless families that decrease the length of time families stay in the shelter system, increase permanent housing outcomes, and break the cycle of homelessness.

Lack of Available and Affordable Housing

Despite this impressive and innovative continuum of services, Central Ohio still lacks the most important component required to end homelessness – accessible and affordable housing. Homeless families and individuals are a sub-set of very poor households in Franklin County who cannot afford decent, safe housing.

In Ohio, the Fair Market Rent of a typical two-bedroom apartment is \$535 per month. A worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$5.15 per hour) has to work 80 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent. Alternatively a worker would have to earn \$10.30 per hour to afford an apartment. Disabled Ohioans receiving SSI can afford monthly rent of no more than \$111.¹²

There is only one affordable rental unit in Central Ohio for every two extremely low-income renter households, or a deficit of about 22,000 affordable rental units with incomes at or below 30% of median income.¹³

A typical homeless family receives on \$630 per month¹⁴. This translates to an ability to afford an apartment that rents for less than \$200. A single adult, homeless woman has an average annual income of about \$3,500 and needs an apartment renting for less than \$100 a month.

The need for permanent supportive housing for disabled homeless is underscored by the size of the waiting list for a new 25-unit apartment building – 94 homeless persons who are either living outside or long-term in shelters are on the waiting list after just four months of operation.¹⁵

Coordinated Local Investment

In addition to coordinated funding provided via the Community Shelter Board, a local collaborative of funders was established in 1999. The Rebuilding Lives Funder Collaborative evolved out of the need for the collaboration described previously. The 16-member Collaborative provides funding for the capital, services and operations of supportive housing in order to achieve the community goal to develop 800 units of supportive housing for homeless men with long-term needs. The Collaborative was funded through the Rebuilding Lives plan to jointly develop: strategies, program guidelines and standards, underwriting criteria, program evaluation, outcome measurement and reporting requirements. The group meets monthly to review, evaluate, and approve funding for individual projects, as well as, assist with providing access to other community resources necessary for the success of approved projects.

TABLE 2 . MEMBERSHIP OF THE REBUILDING LIVES FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

ADAMH Services Board	Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services
City of Columbus Administration	Franklin County Board of Commissioners
Columbus City Council	Franklin County Office on Aging
Columbus Foundation	Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Columbus Health Department	Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing
Columbus Medical Association Foundation	United Way of Central Ohio
Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority	Veteran's Service Commission
Community Shelter Board	
Corporation for Supportive Housing	

Additional Federal Response Needed

Columbus/Franklin County is a model community in terms of the level of cooperation and coordination among providers and funders. We are a model in terms of the level of local investment – private and public. We know what works and can document success. We are committed to ending – not just managing – homelessness. Without a strong federal partnership we cannot be successful.

Recommendations:

1. Make permanent the provision that requires that 30% of the HUD Homeless Assistance Grant program funding be spent for permanent housing.
2. Make permanent the shift of the cost of renewing HUD permanent housing units (Shelter Plus Care and Permanent Supportive Housing) out of McKinney and into the Housing Certificate Fund.
3. Provide HUD funding to end homelessness among chronically homeless and chronically ill people by developing 300,000 new units of supportive housing.
4. Support the development of a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund to expand affordable rental housing.
5. Provide DHHS funding for supportive services on-site in permanent supportive housing.
6. Continue to require a local Continuum of Care process that relies on the expertise of the nonprofit sector. It is an effective planning requirement that forces local communities to work together to provide coordinated services, shelter and housing to homeless persons.
7. Examine how the federal government can prevent homelessness through effective discharge planning at federal and state level and provision of homeless prevention services.

8. Provide federal funding to help nonprofit organizations develop the capacity to create and operate permanent supportive housing across the country.

Thank you for your interest and attention to this important subject.

¹ Statement of Nan Roman, President, The National Alliance to End Homelessness, to the Subcommittee on VA, HUD and Independent Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations U.S. House of Representatives, April 13, 2000

² 2000 US Census

³ 2001-2003 Fair Housing Plan, Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio, March 15, 2001.

⁴ 2001-2003 Fair Housing Plan, Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio, March 15, 2001.

⁵ Survey of Attitudes and Opinions on the Homeless in Franklin County, Ohio, GCA Strategies, October 1999

⁶ Community Shelter Board, Homeless Management Information System, January 2001.

⁷ Community Shelter Board, Homeless Management Information System, January 2001.

⁸ Community Shelter Board, Homeless Management Information System, January 2001.

⁹ Rebuilding Lives: A New Strategy to House Homeless Men. Community Shelter Board, October 1998.

¹⁰ Rebuilding Lives: A New Strategy to House Homeless Men. Community Shelter Board, October 1998.

¹¹ Columbus and Franklin County Continuum of Care application, May 2001.

¹² Out of Reach, National Low Income Housing Coalition, September 2000.

¹³ Providing Affordable Rental Housing in Central Ohio: Market Analysis and Community Strategies, Replacement Housing Collaborative, August 1997.

¹⁴ Community Shelter Board, Homeless Management Information System, January 2001.

¹⁵ Personal communication, Susan Weaver, Executive Director, Community Housing Network, March 2001.