

Mayor-President Bobby Simpson
East Baton Rouge
Testimony
On H.R. 4057
House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and
Community Opportunity
Tuesday, July 13, 2004 at 10:00 am

As Mayor-President of East Baton Rouge Parish I represent a diverse community of both rural and inner city. Our community has been fighting the problem of chronic homelessness. The problem of chronic homelessness is not just a big city problem; it is a problem that affects communities across the country large and small, urban and rural.

We have formed the Mayor's Task Force to End Chronic Homelessness. This task force was established to link and expand the local network of homeless service providers to include businesses, schools, local law enforcement and the faith community. Our goal was to create a "one stop shop" for homelessness support. No one agency will be able to solve chronic homelessness. This has to be a collaborative community effort.

As a community we took what we have learned from our Mayor's Task Force to End Chronic Homelessness and applied it to our strategic ten-year plan. Our ten-year plan, encouraged in partnership and collaboration with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, is an example of the way that public and private agencies can come together to strategically coordinate and collaborate in the development and implementation of a community-wide plan to end chronic homelessness. Our office of Economic and Community Development, along with entities such as the Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless, Volunteers of America, Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Myriam's House, Catholic Community Services and other non-profit providers, represent a diverse and strong community response, which includes both faith-based and traditional non-profit providers organizations.

As president of the Louisiana Conference of Mayors I am familiar with the Samaritan Initiative. In June of 2003, the U.S. Conference of Mayors met and passed a resolution endorsing the Administration's effort to end chronic homelessness and supporting the 10-year planning process for cities. January 15, 2004 East Baton Rouge Parish unveiled its 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness. Mr. Mangano from the Interagency Council was with us for that announcement. The city-parish of Baton Rouge supports the concept of the single application process provided by the Samaritan Initiative. It fits ideally into our city-parish efforts of one stop shopping for homelessness services. We support the housing strategies that move the chronic homeless from the streets and shelters into housing. We have created the Neighborhood Housing Network to partner with the city to utilize adjudicated properties for developing housing for the homeless. We continue to identify available land to construct "Housing First" Homeless Development. We have formed a partnership with the Baton Rouge Police Department to create the Homeless Triage Center. This center gives police somewhere else to bring the homeless instead of prison. The Homeless Triage Center puts the client in touch with proper services to help end chronic homelessness. The goal is to have all our assets working together. East Baton Rouge Parish has many services but for them to have the most effect there needs to be collaboration and strategic partnerships. The Samaritan Initiative encourages this collaboration and partnership.

Chronic Homelessness is a challenge we must fight together. It is not just a big city problem, chronic homelessness affects us all. This is a problem that taxes our police department, health services, our community and our budget. No one agency will be able to solve it. To accomplish our goal of ending chronic homelessness, local, state, and federal entities must work together to maximize our assets. I truly believe that in the world's most prosperous county it is unacceptable to have men, women, and children living on the streets. A home is fundamental to an individual's happiness, health, and success. I am committed to our community effort to end homelessness in Baton Rouge.