

**Statement of  
James Michael Van Leeuwen  
Project Manager for Denver's Road Home**

**on behalf of**

**Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper  
The United States Conference of Mayors  
The National Community Development Association**

**before**

**The United States House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Housing Community Opportunity of  
the Committee on Financial Services**

**on**

**The Reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless  
Assistance Act**

**Rayburn House Office Building Room 2128  
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**Tuesday, October 16, 2007**



**U.S. Conference of Mayors Congressional Testimony  
McKinney-Vento Reauthorization  
October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

On behalf of Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of reauthorization of McKinney-Vento. My name is James Michael Van Leeuwen, and I am the Project Manager for Denver's Road Home, Denver's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. In this testimony, I have included an overview of the work we are doing in Denver as it relates to our ten year plan to end homelessness and our well-established partnership with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. This testimony is also supported by the National Community Development Association. I want to first and foremost acknowledge the leadership and partnership that Denver shares with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the U.S. Conference of Mayors in our efforts to forge collaboration and build strategic alliances allowing us to more effectively respond to homelessness in Denver. This overview will assess both our progress as well as the cost savings we are experiencing as a result of our coordinated response to assist the homeless in Denver in living life off of the streets.

I have also prepared a response to the questions that the subcommittee has expressed interest in better understanding and will underscore where the U.S. Conference of Mayors is on record with respect to the reauthorization of McKinney-Vento. I have also included two resolutions adopted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors at the annual meetings held in June.

***Denver's Road Home***

Denver's Road Home ([www.denversroadhome.org](http://www.denversroadhome.org)) began in October 2003 in response to an increasing rise in homeless persons in the City & County of Denver and a mounting increase in public safety concerns. At that time, Mayor Hickenlooper convened a commission to develop and recommend a comprehensive plan seeking to address the root causes of homelessness and bring an end to homelessness for the Denver community. This plan is unique in its approach to not just serve the chronically homeless, but to offer opportunities and hope to all persons living on the street, in shelters or doubled up with friends and family in Denver, with a singular emphasis on persons and families whose incomes are at or below 30% area median income (those most in need and hardest to serve).

Forty-one commissioners and 350 community volunteers conducted a comprehensive research and planning process over the course of 18 months to develop a plan with eight primary goals focused on:

- Permanent and transitional housing
- Emergency shelter systems
- Prevention
- Services
- Public Safety and Outreach
- Education, Training & Employment
- Community Awareness & Coordinated Responses
- Zoning, Urban Design & Land Use

The plan was approved by Denver City Council and Mayor Hickenlooper in 2005 and was implemented in July 2005. For this plan to be successful, it is imperative that the community (public and private sectors, the foundation community, faith-based organizations, service delivery providers, community members and service recipients) own this initiative and continue to mobilize resources in order to achieve the ambitious goals affect systemic change.

From the beginning the citizens of Denver were promised a plan with achievable and sustainable goals with measurable action steps, as well as a plan that emphasizes collaborative efforts and accountability from all people of the Denver community. To this end, national evaluators specializing in research and assessment in the field of homeless issues have agreed to oversee the evaluation. Moreover, Denver is part of an innovators national network convened by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Rockefeller Foundation to identify and spread best practices across the nation.

We believe the end result has both compassion and accountability. We worked to create a balance of service delivery such as housing, treatment services and job training with the expectation of responsibility and self-reliance from those who receive services (for example, participants must participate in social service programs and pay 30% of their income for housing). Just two years into the initiative, there is evidence that Denver's Road Home is responding with an **11% reduction in overall homelessness and a 36% decrease in chronic homelessness**. During our first two years, in collaboration with the extraordinary leadership of our homeless providers, we have accomplished the following:

- 789 new units of housing have been developed.
- 2,455 homeless people have been assisted in finding work.
- 2,003 individuals accessed public benefits and treatment services.
- 563 families received eviction assistance.
- 132 homeless persons entered housing through the Denver Street Outreach Collaboration.
- 233 families have been partnered with our faith-based mentoring teams.

While we are encouraged by this process, the 2007 MDHI Point in Time Data for the City and County of Denver tells us that there is much more work to be done.

- There remain over 3,900 men, women and children in the City & County of Denver living on the streets, under bridges, in alleyways, in cars or in shelters. Of these, 46% are women and children and 40% are working.
- There were over 600 homeless households with children, totaling 1,563 individual people. Of these households, 465 were single parent families. Twenty-nine percent of homeless respondents in Denver were women.
- The most commonly reported reason for homelessness reported in Denver was loss of a job (28%), followed by relationship or family break up (20%) and substance abuse (19%).

In terms of cost savings, we know that permanent supportive housing is demonstrating proven outcomes in our ability to transition the homeless off of the streets and into housing. It costs Denver taxpayers over \$40,000 per homeless person per year while the individual lives on the streets. To operate one bed of shelter, it costs Denver \$18,000 annually versus \$15,000 annually to maintain one unit of permanent supportive housing. When taking into consideration Denver CARES, the primary detox facility for the City & County of Denver, the 25 highest users logged a cumulative total of 2,657 admissions; an average of over 100 nights per person per year of detox services. After one year in permanent supportive housing, there was a 79.6% reduction in admissions to a cumulative total of 541 admissions in one year.

Permanent supportive housing combines service requirements with accountability. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless released a study in Fall 2006 based on a permanent supportive housing project developed in the central downtown business improvement district next to the YMCA involving 100 units of housing for the chronically homeless. The average length of homelessness of these individuals was eight years. One year after enrolling in this housing project, 77% remained in housing. Average monthly incomes increased from \$185 at entry to \$431; 34% of the participants obtained benefits. Participants who were in the program for two years had a 60% decrease in hospitalizations, substance abuse inpatient treatment, detox or jail use. Emergency service utilization was 44% fewer days than at enrollment. In the first two years of Denver's Road Home, average detox treatment dropped \$8,732, from \$10,373 for a chronically homeless person living on the streets to \$1,641 for a formerly homeless person living in housing.

As it relates to H. 840, Mayor Hickenlooper and the Denver Homeless Commission remain very supportive of the idea of every local community having a strategic plan to address the needs of homeless veterans with a focus on housing.

Mayor Hickenlooper and the Denver Homeless Commission are also very committed to the concept of 30 percent set-aside funds for housing to support ten year plans to end homelessness across the country. We know that in order for people who are homeless to live life off of the streets that services for the homeless must be complimented with increased housing stock.

### Subcommittee Questions

With respect to whether the definition of "homeless individual" should be modified, at this time, the U.S. Conference of Mayors does not have a policy calling for a broader definition. The concept of doubling up has not been a definition that Mayor Hickenlooper has been in favor of and is a topic that was tabled by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. While homeless advocates have championed a more broad definition, broadening this definition dilutes current efforts in cities such as Denver to respond and target services to the homeless in the greatest need of services and having the greatest impact on existing systems (e.g. law enforcement, emergency services).

Further research on homeless is vitally needed as would be authorized by the bill. The U.S. Conference of Mayors has issued an annual homeless study for 22 years. This study has as its goal the analysis of the causes of hunger and homelessness and the demographics of the populations experiencing these problems. While our survey has provided useful information to policy makers at the local, state and national level, it is limited by the small number of cities currently surveyed (25 to 30 cities). Although we plan to expand the number of cities surveyed, it will be very important to have a more definitive study that would be authorized by H.R. 840.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors supports the Senate bill S.1518. With respect to the prescribing the composition and decision-making structure of local homeless planning bodies applying for McKinney-Vento funding, the Senate bill does the following:

*Collaborative Applicants, similar to existing Continuums of Care, would be established. The Collaborative Applicants would have greater responsibility for overseeing homeless assistance programs and would be eligible for up to 3 percent of total funding for administrative costs. Collaborative Applicants could also become Unified Funding Agencies, which would give them responsibility for receiving homeless assistance funding from HUD and distributing it to project sponsors. Collaborative Applicants that are also Unified Funding Agencies could receive up to 6 percent of total funding for administrative costs.*

Mayor Hickenlooper endorses the idea of jurisdictional leaders leading up homeless initiatives as this structure lends itself to greater accountability to the decision making process. Jurisdictional leadership, as defined by Denver's Road Home, also facilitates greater collaboration and promotes a more cost effective and strategic homeless service delivery system.

S. 1518 provides 30 percent of total funds for permanent housing for individuals with a disability or families headed by a person with a disability. At least 10 percent of overall funds would be for permanent housing for families with children. The U.S. Conference of Mayors is on record supporting this policy. The Senate bill provides a flexibility incentive for high-performing communities – those communities reducing the number of people who become homeless, the length of time people are homeless, and recidivism back into homelessness. These high-performing communities would be allowed to use their homeless assistance funding more flexibly and to serve groups that are risk of becoming homeless. Again, we supported the Senate bill and this provision.

Included with this testimony are the resolutions adopted in Los Angeles in June 2007 by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. One of the resolutions is strongly supportive of ten year plans to end homelessness and strongly believe that the McKinney-Vento reauthorization should take this strong mayoral participation in developing the plans into account. On behalf of Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I want to thank you for your time this morning and welcome any questions you might have regarding the nature of this testimony.

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Celebrating 75 Years

## **2007 ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS** *COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING*

### **ENDORISING INNOVATIVE POLICIES TO SUCCESSFULLY END AND PREVENT CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS ACROSS THE NATION**

**WHEREAS**, mayors are committed to ending chronic homelessness in our nation's cities; and

**WHEREAS**, chronically homeless individuals, those with the most persistent forms of homelessness, are afflicted not only by poverty but also by severe conditions such as mental illness and substance abuse; and

**WHEREAS**, mayors and cities are on the front lines of the response to chronic homelessness; and

**WHEREAS**, in order for persons experiencing chronic homelessness to succeed in their housing, supportive services are necessary to mitigate health, substance abuse, and mental health problems; and

**WHEREAS**, numerous studies compiled by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness have shown that permanent supportive housing models to end chronic homelessness are highly effective and that the cost of providing supportive housing is substantially offset by savings in the most expensive systems of community care including hospitalizations, jails, and other correctional facilities; and

**WHEREAS**, these supportive strategies improve the quality of life for both the individuals being housed and the community at large; and

**WHEREAS**, ending chronic homelessness requires collaboration and coordination at all levels of government, together with community institutions, businesses, and faith-based organizations, to determine how best to implement prevention and intervention strategies; and

**WHEREAS**, over 300 cities have created jurisdictionally-based 10Year Plans to end chronic homelessness, many of which are showing results; and

**WHEREAS**, though there is progress in many communities, new data demonstrates that homelessness continues to be one of our nation's most challenging social problems; as many as 3.5 million people experience homelessness over the course of a year; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors strongly supports the increased investment in proven strategies that end chronic homelessness, with a strong focus on permanent housing with supportive services; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors, to achieve the goal of ending chronic homelessness in 10 years, urges Congress to appropriate \$1.8 billion in HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants program, which would enable communities to develop 15,000 units of permanent supportive housing; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors continues to endorse and urges Congress to create new permanent funding sources for supportive services for the homeless within the Health and Human Services budget; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors urges Congress to re-authorize the McKinney-Vento Act with provisions for regulatory relief that would allow existing federal funds appropriated through McKinney-Vento to be fully expended and more efficiently utilized each budget year; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors, through the re-authorization of McKinney-Vento Act, fund an innovative grants program that would provide demonstration grants to communities across the nation implementing ten-year plans to end chronic homelessness; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors calls on Congress and the Administration to provide permanent supportive housing to assist the nation's significant and growing homeless veterans population, including providing additional Section 8 Vouchers for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) program, which provides permanent housing subsidies and case management services to homeless veterans with mental and addictive disorders; and through the VA Medical Care Account, provide a dollar for dollar supportive services match for the HUD-VASH Section 8 vouchers; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors urges Congress and HUD to end homelessness for the roughly 600,000 families who are homeless each year by providing rapid rehousing programs that focus on helping homeless families move back into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that U.S. Conference of Mayors endorses and urges Congress to enact legislation that would provide Federal assistance to youth over the age of 18 aging out of foster care.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that The U.S. Conference of Mayors affirms the value of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and commends its initiatives to support mayors as they implement ten year plans.



Celebrating 75 Years

## **2007 ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS** *COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING*

### **ENDING HOMELESSNESS FOR VETERANS BY INCREASING PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING RESOURCES**

**WHEREAS**, the men and women of the armed services have made sacrifices for the American people and we have an obligation to care for them if they need services or housing; and

**WHEREAS**, mayors are committed to supporting homeless veterans and assuring they have the housing and services they need to rebuild their lives; and

**WHEREAS**, the Veterans Administration CHALENG report estimates that there are 195,827 homeless veterans in our nation; and

**WHEREAS**, the FY 2006 CHALENG report indicates that the one of the greatest unmet needs for veterans is long-term, permanent housing and that over 24,000 units of long-term, permanent housing are needed; and

**WHEREAS**, homeless veterans with disabilities often need housing that is deeply affordable with onsite services to help them remain housed and thrive in our communities; and

**WHEREAS**, creating permanent supportive housing for disabled veterans will increase the availability of existing transitional housing units for the men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who become homeless and are in need of stabilization services to re-integrate back into the community; and

**WHEREAS**, ending homelessness, especially for veterans will require distinct funding sources including capital, operating and services dollars, in addition to strong partnerships with the Veterans Administration to support the development and services within these settings;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the U.S. Conference of Mayors support the increased investment to end homelessness for veterans using proven strategies such as creating permanent supportive housing units designated for veterans; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the U.S. Conference of Mayors continue to endorse legislation that creates new funding sources to create permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans that includes funds for new construction with dollars for operating and onsite treatment services through increased resources for the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program, and targeted resources within the Department of Health and Human Services for mental health and substance abuse treatment services and within the Department of Labor for workforce assistance.