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## **NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS RELEASES NEW REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS**

***COHHIO cautions that 30 percent decrease in Ohio from 2005 to 2007  
does not represent full picture***

**COLUMBUS** – On January 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, the Homelessness Research Institute of the National Alliance to End Homelessness released its second Homelessness Counts report. According to the report, *Ohio* experienced a 30 percent decrease in homelessness from 2005 to 2007. However, Ohio’s 2008 report shows an increase of 1,557 over 2007 numbers.

“While we applaud the efforts of NAEH to track and compare homeless numbers and we celebrate any downturn in numbers, the report does not present the full picture,” said Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio. “It captures only a portion of the number of homeless on a given night. This data point can be compared from one year to the next, but is incapable of capturing the vast numbers who are turned away at shelters, who are doubled up with family or friends, or who avoid the annual point-in-time count.”

The 2005 and 2007 estimates are compilations of point-in-time counts collected by local Continuums of Care (CoCs) -- the HUD- defined jurisdictions that oversee homeless services and are required to count their homeless populations every other year on one night in January. As such, the report provides data on CoCs within states as well. Despite limitations, the estimates act as a tool for assessing the progress the nation has made on reducing homelessness.

The NAEH report, which contains both state and national data, shows a 10 percent decrease in homelessness in the nation, from 744,313 per night in January 2005 to 671,859 per night in January 2007. This includes a 28 percent decrease in chronic (long-term) homelessness and an 18 percent decrease in family homelessness. While overall homelessness has declined, the picture varied among the states, with 36 percent reporting increases in homelessness and the rest reporting decreases.

COHHIO recently reported on Ohio’s point-in-time count conducted in January, 2008. Of the 12,821 Ohioans homeless during a single 24-hour period in 2008:

- 10,327 were sheltered
- 2492 were unsheltered
- 5003 were persons in families
- 7816 were individuals
- 2431 were chronically homeless
- 2021 were severely mentally ill
- 3167 were chronic substance abusers

Many local advocates and service providers fear the national trend may be reversed and blame the current recession and housing foreclosure crisis for more recent increases in homelessness that they have witnessed.

In addition, said Faith, it is dangerous to have policy makers rely too heavily on point-in-time counts that “by their very nature, are inherently flawed. This is a one-day count versus a 365-day count. The numbers are wildly conservative.”

A number of factors contribute to homelessness — lack of income, eviction due to foreclosure, physical health and disability, mental health and trauma, substance abuse, and weak social networks — but a lack of affordable housing, both in *Ohio* and across the nation is the primary driver.

“Our hope is that this year the new Administration and Congress will make ending the tragedy of homelessness an important part of their plans for change,” said Nan Roman, President of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. “We encourage them to use the upcoming economic recovery bill to help people who lose their jobs or are evicted as the result of foreclosure to avoid homelessness. Small amounts of money for rent or utilities can help people stay in their homes. Furthermore, investing in affordable housing through initiatives like the National Housing Trust Fund will help ensure that no one is without a home.”

“We urge our Congressional representatives to support economic recovery legislation that includes funding to prevent homelessness and increase affordable housing,” added Faith. He urged adoption the following line items:

- Capitalize the new National Housing Trust Fund at \$10 billion for two years to rehabilitate or build 100,000 rental homes for the lowest income households using green standards.
- Fund 400,000 new Housing Vouchers at \$3.6 billion for two years to provide the lowest income households with rent assistance.
- Fund the homelessness prevention component of the Emergency Shelter Grant program at \$2 billion for two years to prevent low-income households from becoming homeless and to rapidly re-house those that do lose their homes; 400,000 households will be assisted.
- Fund the Public Housing Capital Fund at \$5 billion for two years to upgrade public housing using green standards.
- Provide \$3 billion for two years to upgrade federally assisted multi-family housing using green standards. From the rural side: \$250 million for construction of 3,000 new rental units – 3,500 jobs; \$400 million for multi-family housing preservation – preserve 14,870 Section 515 rentals and create 4,400 jobs; \$20 million for loans and \$80 million for grants in the Section 504 program

Faith said these initiatives will not only assist those most in need by preventing homelessness and increasing access to affordable housing, but also will create over 200,000 jobs and make homes more energy efficient. “Taken together, these five items will assist more than 800,000 households hardest hit by the recession,” he said.

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Data for every state and community (CoC) for which data are available, as well as an explanation of the methods used to collect the data, are included in the full report.

To download a full copy of the report, visit: <http://www.endhomelessness.org>

For more information on COHHIO and the 2008 Homelessness Report, visit: <http://www.cohhio.org>