

ENDORISING FIVE FUNDAMENTALS TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

A CHALLENGE TO
CANDIDATES FOR
PUBLIC OFFICE



PLEASE HELP
ME I'm POOR
AND SICK I WILL
VOTE FOR YOU
THANK YOU

CAMPAIGN TOOL KIT
JULY 2008

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Sponsored by:

Coalition for Supportive Housing
National AIDS Housing Coalition
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Center on Family Homelessness
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Network for Youth
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness

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Introduction

On November 4, 2008, the presidency, all seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of U.S. Senate seats will be up for election. Additionally, governors, mayors, county executives, state and local legislators, and some judges will be elected across the United States.

On this same election night, even as confetti drops at victory celebrations across the nation, an estimated 745,000 United States citizens and residents will suffer from lack of a safe place to live. Over the course of a year, an estimated 3.5 million Americans will experience homelessness.

Mass homelessness has persisted in the United States for over 20 years. It is imperative that all sectors of society, especially our government – at all levels - take action to eradicate this social evil and national shame.

Candidates for public office make commitments to all number of actions – largely in response to requests from vocal constituencies. With that in mind, an assembly of national organizations concerned with homelessness has developed an opportunity for candidates to pledge to prioritize the prevention and end of homelessness by endorsing *Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness*.

Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness

The twentieth anniversary of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act on July 22, 2007, marked the onset of the third decade of the national government response to mass homelessness in the United States. An assembly of nonprofit organizations concerned with homelessness used the occasion of the McKinney Act anniversary to declare five fundamental principles that must animate public policy in a nation without mass homelessness:

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- I. McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs should be reauthorized.
- II. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased.
- III. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them.
- IV. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.
- V. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented.

Take Action

It is imperative that individuals and organizations concerned about homelessness challenge all candidates for public office to take action to prevent and end mass homelessness. The five fundamentals are a suitable basis for issuing such a challenge. Action steps to consider include:

- o Send an organization or individual letter to all candidates for public offices representing your geographic area to endorse the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness. Be sure to invite all candidates for the office(s) to make the endorsement. Do not limit your request to the incumbent. It is critical that you direct your action to candidates from all political parties. (see *instructions for identifying candidates for public office, sample letter, and pledge form*)
- o Invite your members, supporters, family members and friends to also take action. (see *action alert*)
- o Circulate a petition requesting candidates to endorse the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness (see *petition*)
- o Host a community forum on homelessness and invite candidates for public office to participate in speaking roles. (see *forum guide*)
- o Attend candidates' outreach events such as town hall meetings, coffees, and meet-and-greets. (see *suggested candidate questions*)

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- Invite candidates to tour a homeless assistance program. (see *tour guide*)
- Ask candidates to take the Homeless Challenge. (see *candidate homeless challenge guide*)
- Publicize your results so that others in your community will know which candidates for public office have pledged to take action to prevent and end homelessness. (see *Sample News Release* and *Take Action Report Form*)

Action Tool Kit

We have developed a tool kit to assist organizations and individuals concerned with homelessness to issue candidate challenges on the Five Fundamentals. Materials included in the Tool Kit are:

- Five Fundamentals Statement
- Instructions for Identifying Candidates for Public Office
- Sample Five Fundamentals Invitation Letter to Candidates
- Five Fundamentals Candidate Pledge Form
- Sample Five Fundamentals Action Alert
- Sample Five Fundamentals Petition
- Candidate Forum Guide
- Candidate Program Tour Guide
- Candidate Homeless Challenge
- Sample News Release for Organizations
- Take Action Report Form

**ENTERING THE THIRD DECADE OF THE
NATIONAL RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA:
A CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON FIVE FUNDAMENTALS**

The July 22, 2007, twentieth anniversary of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act marked the onset of the third decade of the national government response to mass homelessness in the United States. This anniversary calls for consideration of what is needed to overcome homelessness and for a new spirit of commitment and determination to eradicate this social evil.

The undersigned national organizations call for reauthorization of McKinney Act programs, and in the forward-looking spirit of the bi-partisan authors of the Act we declare fundamental principles that must animate public policy in a nation without mass homelessness.

Consider:

- On one night in January 2005, at least 744,313 homeless men, women and children were without homes in America. Although all counts of homeless persons are imprecise and controversial, it is unacceptable that hundreds and hundreds of Americans remain homeless each night.
- On an annualized basis, as many as 3.5 million Americans are thought to experience homelessness each year. Over 1.35 million of these are children.
- Full time work at the current minimum wage does not provide sufficient income to rent a one-bedroom apartment in any county in America.
- In 2006, in constant dollars, the budget authority for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development was only 49% of what it was in 1978.
- The life expectancy of homeless persons is 30 years less than for other Americans, and their rates of illnesses of all kinds are far greater than for others.
- 160 unprovoked assaults were committed against homeless persons in 2007, with 28 of these resulting in death. 2007 saw more attacks than any of the previous eight years.
- City ordinances frequently serve as a tool to criminalize homelessness. Of 224 cities surveyed in 2005: 28% prohibit "camping" in particular public places in the city and 16% had citywide prohibitions on "camping"; 27% prohibit sitting/lying in certain public places and 16% prohibit loitering citywide; 43% prohibit begging in particular public

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places, 45% prohibit aggressive panhandling and 21% have city-wide prohibitions on begging.

- Between 150,000 and 200,000 veterans of the United States armed forces are homeless on any given night, and one-third of homeless men are veterans. Nearly 400,000 veterans will experience homelessness sometime during the course of a year. The newest generation of combat veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (OIF-OEF), both men and women, are returning home and suffering from war related conditions that may put them at risk for homelessness.
- More than half of people experiencing homeless nationwide have no health insurance and are typically unable to access the health care they need to stabilize and resolve their health issues, which prolong their homelessness. They are among 47 million US residents who are uninsured at any time.
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Of all homeless women, 60 percent have been abused by age 12, and 63 percent have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults. On an annualized basis, at least 1.7 million youth run away from home due to severe family conflict, abuse or neglect, or are expelled from their homes by a family member.
- Over 900,000 homeless children and youth were identified and enrolled in public schools in the 2005-2006 school year, a 50% increase from the 2003-2004 school year. However, the Department of Education count does not include pre-school children, and over 40% of homeless children are under the age of five.
- Federally funded programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act made over 740,000 street contacts to youth in 2007, but only seven percent (a little over 52,000) received shelter or housing options. Over 6,800 youth were turned away and denied shelter and housing in 2007. A 2006 report on homeless youth by the Congressional Research Service noted "grantees serve only a fraction of the more than one million youth who run away or are homeless."
- An untold number of homeless people continue to reside in rural areas of the US but remain uncounted and largely unserved.

National nonprofit organizations and a host of state and local organizations have worked vigorously throughout the 21 years of the McKinney Act to end homelessness. The undersigned nonprofit organizations have developed various analyses and strategies to end homelessness, but have agreed on the following Five Fundamentals:

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I. The McKinney-Vento programs should be reauthorized.

“McKinney-Vento” programs within the US Department of Housing and Urban Development provide approximately \$1.5 billion per year in shelter, services and supportive housing for people who are currently homeless. We believe that the HUD McKinney-Vento programs have helped very many homeless persons to survive, to improve their circumstances, and to escape homelessness.

Yet a number of systemic factors result in a constant flood of newly homeless persons replacing those whose status has improved. Mass homelessness is still an emergency.

Our national organizations agree that an explicit national commitment to meet the immediate needs of homeless persons must be expressed through HUD McKinney-Vento reauthorization, and that the Congress must appropriate sufficient resources for the purpose.

Likewise, the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program must be reauthorized, and other targeted homeless programs must be reauthorized, including the Health Care for the Homeless Program, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, and the Programs for Assistance in the Transition from Homelessness (each originally part of the McKinney Act), the Treatment for Homeless Persons Program (in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reauthorization) and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Pending legislation that includes the needs of homeless people in mainstream programs that serve the needs of poor people must be enacted, including the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the Food Stamp Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration titles of the Public Health Service Act.

We recall that the McKinney Act, at the time of its adoption in 1987, was viewed as only the first step in a national response to homelessness. This bi-partisan legislation providing emergency relief measures was to be followed by measures to prevent homelessness and by more systemic solutions to the problem. The remaining Fundamentals must be addressed in public policy to make good on that early promise of the McKinney Act.

II. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased if homelessness is to be abated. Homelessness is at

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root a housing problem, driven by the dire shortage of housing units that are affordable for very poor people. The historic withdrawal of federal support for the creation and operation of low-income housing that began in the early 1980s and continues today must be reversed if homelessness is to be ended.

III. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them. Debilitating health and social problems often precipitate and are aggravated by homelessness. Existing “safety net” systems are gravely inadequate for homeless people and for those at risk of homelessness; in most states, impoverished and homeless adults are not eligible for Medicaid. Comprehensive health insurance for everyone must be enacted as the equitable basis for financing necessary services, while targeted services for those with special needs and services linked with housing must also be supported. Children and youth need school stability and support if they are to acquire the skills needed to avoid poverty and homelessness as adults.

IV. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life. Individuals’ responsibility to care for themselves – including paying for housing, health care and other services – can only be fulfilled if their incomes are adequate. People who are able to work should be paid a living wage; that is not now the case for most homeless people who work. People who are disabled and cannot work should receive public support at living wage levels.

V. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented. Public systems including education, child welfare, criminal justice, health care and others must not deny services on the basis of one’s housing status. Homeless persons’ civil rights to vote, to frequent public places, to utilize public facilities, and to enjoy equal protection of the law must be supported and advanced.

We recognize that much remains to be done to relieve the suffering and financial costs of homelessness. We believe that a renewed, concerted effort to eradicate mass homelessness is required by our commitment to basic human rights and by our responsibilities to our neighbors. We call on the governments that represent and act for us all to implement these fundamental principles, and we pledge our own diligence to these ends.

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ENDORSED BY:

AIDS Housing of Washington
The AIDS Institute
Catholic Charities USA
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Catholic Health East
Coalition on Human Needs
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Covenant House International
Family Promise
Give US Your Poor
The Institute on Homelessness and Trauma
Lutheran Services in America
Mercy Housing, Inc.
National AIDS Housing Coalition
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Center on Family Homelessness
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Network for Youth
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
National WIC Association
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
USAction
Volunteers of America

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING
CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE**

1. The National Association for State Election Directors website has state-by-state listings of state elections authorities, under the heading: "Roster of States".

<http://www.nased.org/membership.html>

2. If your state's information is not listed or is outdated, use an Internet search engine to find a website of your state elections authority. Use keywords "[your state] division of elections" or "[your state] board of elections".
3. The website of your state's elections authority will likely provide a list of declared candidates for public offices in your geographic area. Alternatively, you can contact the office by telephone and receive the list.
4. Your local elections authority will have the contact information for declared candidates. Or use an Internet search engine to find their campaign website or contact information.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE
TO ENDORSE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS TO
PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS**

Instructions

1. Invite candidates for public offices representing your geographic area at all levels of government – national, state, regional, and local – to endorse the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness.
2. Invite candidates for public offices at all branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial (if elected).
3. Invite declared candidates of both major political parties and serious third parties to endorse the Five Fundamentals. DO NOT direct your outreach to candidates of one party only. See additional Tool Kit material for guidance on identifying candidates for public offices representing your geographic area.
4. Address correspondence to the candidates' campaign addresses, if obtainable, rather than their business or home addresses, including the government addresses of current officeholders seeking re-election.)
5. Use the sample letter provided as a template, but add a personal touch to make it your own.
 - a. Introduce yourself and/or the organization you are representing.
 - b. Explain why the issue of mass homelessness is important for them to address as a prospective public official.
 - c. Directly ask the candidate to pledge their support of the five fundamentals to prevent and end homelessness.
 - d. Request the candidate to make the pledge in writing by completing an enclosed Five Fundamentals Candidate Endorsement Form and returning it to you. (Follow instructions in this Tool Kit for submitting the form to the national organizations leading this endorsement campaign.)

Sample Endorsement Invitation Letter to Candidates

Dear [name of candidate]:

Thank you for offering your service as a public official by declaring your candidacy for [insert name of office being sought]

[Introduce yourself and/or your organization. If writing on behalf of an organization, describe its mission, purpose, number of members, and/or number of clients served annually]

[I am/We are] writing to ask you to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among your public policy priorities, if elected to public office. As evidence of such a pledge, we seek your endorsement of the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness, a statement of principles issued in 2007 by an assembly of nonprofit organizations concerned with homelessness.

Mass homelessness in the United States is a social evil and national shame. An estimated 3.5 million Americans are homeless in any given year [, including approximately XX people in the geographic area you will be representing as an office holder]. 1.35 million of these individuals are children. As many as 200,000 homeless persons are veterans. Persons who are homeless are less likely than others to receive health and mental health care they need, resulting in a life expectancy of thirty years less than the general population. Many of our nation's homeless adults are working, but earning incomes insufficient to afford housing in their communities. Children and youth who are homeless are less likely to break the cycle by graduating from high school. 92 percent of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at least once. All people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to hate crimes and violence, and so this grim list of statistics could be continued.

Mass homelessness is not the result of personal deficits of individuals, but rather the failure of government at all levels to ensure that social and economic conditions are in place that allow each American to secure basic human needs, including health care, a source of income, and a permanent, safe, and affordable place to live.

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Mass homelessness is neither inevitable nor intractable. At an individual level, homeless people themselves, supported by a vast network of governmental and nongovernmental agencies, are working daily to secure jobs, health care, public benefits, and housing. At a systemic level, federal, state, and local governments are establishing strategic plans to prevent and end homelessness, developing evidence-based and promising programmatic responses, and investing in public human needs programs. Yet efforts to date are insufficient, as made evident by the fact that over three million Americans lack a permanent home each year, and an even larger number are at imminent risk of losing their housing. Much more must be done if we are to see an end to homelessness in the United States.

With that in mind, [I/we] have joined with an assembly of nonprofit organizations concerned with homelessness to declare five fundamental principles that must animate public policy in a nation without mass homelessness:

- I. McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs should be reauthorized.
- II. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased.
- III. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them.
- IV. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.
- V. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented.

I have included the full consensus statement on the Five Fundamentals with this letter.

[I/we] strongly urge you to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among your public policy priorities by endorsing the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness. To do so, please complete the enclosed Candidate Endorsement Form and return it to [me/us] so that [I/we] may have your name recorded on the roster of pledged candidates.

Our organization will notify our members and the general public of those endorsing the Five Fundamentals. The national organizations coordinating this campaign also will add your name to a list of pledged candidates. We urge you to publicize your

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pledge of the Five Fundamentals as well. We believe it is necessary for mass homelessness to be at the forefront of this current election.

Together, policymakers and the public they represent, including people experiencing homelessness, must and can end mass homelessness in the United States. We look forward to working with you to make this aspiration a reality.

Sincerely,

XX

CANDIDATE PLEDGE FORM

Return Form to [Insert Your Organization's Contact Information]

I, _____,
a candidate for the office of _____,

endorse the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End
Homelessness, issued in July 2007 by an assembly of nonprofit
organizations concerned with homelessness. I pledge that if
elected/re-elected to public office, I will take action to
implement the Five Fundamentals through advocacy of concrete
public policies that put the five fundamentals into action.
Further, I understand that my endorsement of the Five
Fundamentals may be acknowledged publicly.

Signed _____

On this day, _____

Candidate Contact Information:

SAMPLE ACTION ALERT

**[Prepare on your organization's letterhead.
Customize sections in brackets to localize this alert.]**

TAKE ACTION TODAY

**Ask Candidates for Public Office to
Pledge to Prevent and End Homelessness**

WHAT: [Insert name of organization] urges individuals and organizations concerned with homelessness and poverty to contact candidates for public offices representing [insert name of geographic area] and ask them to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among their public policy priorities, if elected to office.

One way for candidates to take the pledge is to endorse the *Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness*, a statement of principles issued in 2007 by an assembly of nonprofit organizations concerned with homelessness. You may view the Five Fundamentals Statement by visiting the Five Fundamentals Campaign page at www.nationalhomeless.org.

WHEN: Contact candidates for public offices **NOW!** Electoral campaigns are heating up as we head toward Election Day, November 4, 2008.

WHY: Mass homelessness in the United States is a social evil and national shame. An estimated 3.5 million Americans are homeless in any given year. Mass homelessness is neither inevitable nor intractable. Yet, efforts to date to eradicate this social evil are insufficient. Much more must be done if we are to see an end to homelessness in the United States.

With that in mind, an assembly of national organizations that share a concern about homelessness has developed an opportunity for candidates for public office at all levels of government to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among their priorities – by endorsing Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness. [Insert name of organization] supports this national effort.

HOW:

1. Write letters to candidates for public offices representing [insert name of geographic area] and ask them to pledge to include the prevention

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and end of homelessness among their public policy priorities, if elected to office.

2. A sample letter is attached. Please customize it to give it a local flavor.

3. Mail or hand-deliver your letters to candidates for public offices.

4. A list of candidates for public offices representing [insert name of geographic area] is provided below.

WHO:

[Insert name of organization] asks that letters be sent to all candidates for public offices representing [insert name of geographic area]. A list of public offices and candidates for those offices follows [or is attached, or is posted online at XXXX] [It is the responsibility of the alert sender to assemble a set of candidate contact information]:

Federal Level

[List candidates and campaign addresses for the U.S. Senate and U.S. Representative(s) seats representing your geographic area.]

State Level

[List candidates and campaign addresses for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and state Senators and Representatives serving your geographic area.]

Local Level

[List candidates and campaign addresses for Mayor, County Executive, and county or city council/commission members serving your geographic area.]

For Additional Information:

- Contact [insert name and information for organization contact]
- Visit the Five Fundamentals Campaign web page at:
www.nationalhomeless.org.

Sample Letter to Accompany Action Alert
[Note: Requires Organization Circulating Alert to Input
Information]

Dear [name of candidate]:

I am writing to ask you to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among your public policy priorities, if elected to public office.

Mass homelessness in the United States is a social evil and national shame. An estimated 3.5 million Americans are homeless in any given year. Mass homelessness is not the result of personal deficits of individuals, but rather the failure of government at all levels to ensure that social and economic conditions are in place that allow each American to secure basic human needs, including health care, a source of income, and a permanent, safe, and affordable place to live.

Mass homelessness is neither inevitable nor intractable. Action is taking place across the country to bring this social condition to an end. But much more must be done.

That's why I am asking you to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among your policy priorities, if you are elected to office. I ask you to consider doing so by endorsing five fundamental principals to ending homelessness.

- VI. McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs should be reauthorized.
- VII. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased.
- VIII. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them.
- IX. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.
- X. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented.

To endorse the five fundamentals, please contact [insert contact information of the collecting organization], who can provide you additional information. I look forward to receiving your response. Best wishes on your candidacy.

**PETITION FOR CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE
TO ENDORSE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS TO
PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS**

TO:

[Insert all candidate names for each office to which the petition is being directed], candidates for [Insert Name of Office Sought]

We, the undersigned individuals, declare that homelessness is a national disgrace affecting an estimated 3.5 million Americans in any given year.

We, the undersigned individuals, urge you to pledge to include the prevention and end of homelessness among your public policy priorities, if elected to office.

We, the undersigned individuals, ask you to demonstrate your commitment to this pledge by endorsing **Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness**.

The five fundamental principles, developed by an assembly of nonprofit organizations concerned with homelessness, are that:

- I. McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs should be reauthorized.
- II. The supply of affordable housing must be dramatically increased.
- III. Health care, education, and social services must be provided to all who need them.
- IV. Personal incomes must be sufficient to pay for the necessities of life.
- V. Discrimination against homeless persons must be prevented.

GUIDE TO ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY/CANDIDATE FORUM ON HOMELESSNESS

[NOTE: We do not support or oppose any political candidate or party. Our informational materials are strictly for educational purposes and suggest no endorsement, bias, or preference. Citizens make their electoral decisions based on a broad range of information. Nothing in this guide to organizing a Community/Candidates' Forum is meant to suggest that a person's vote should be cast on the basis of a single issue or event.]

Why hold a public forum on homelessness?

- **EDUCATE:** Few techniques for educating are more effective than personal testimony. Those who attend the forum and those candidates who participate will long remember the moving stories of people struggling to make ends meet and the success stories of community groups beating the odds.
- **ORGANIZE:** A lot of people think you have to be a social worker, builder, or an architect to get involved in solving America's housing crisis. By de-mystifying the subject of housing, by helping people understand local, state and/or federal programs, by explaining to them what's happening in your community, you make it easy for them to get involved.
- **EFFECT CHANGE:** You can send a forceful message to those in power and those who aspire to power by organizing a forum that displays how many people are knowledgeable and concerned about the issue.

Complying with the Law

Community Candidates' Forums are legitimate activities for 501(c) (3) organizations and are an important vehicle for informing your community. But, should you decide to organize one, you must pay close attention to the law.

If, as a nonprofit organization that receives tax-deductible donations, you are planning to educate the public about candidates or issues near election time, you may want to get legal advice. You need to make sure that no one -- either a

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candidate or a member of the public -- has any reason to believe that you have departed from your nonprofit mission and gone into partisan politics. Whether you lose the respect of the community, or whether you lose your nonprofit status, the cost to your primary mission will be too high. If you are concerned about any aspect of the approach we are recommending, consult an attorney.

The how-to approach that we offer you in this packet describes a way to educate citizens about homelessness/housing issues and candidates' positions without getting into partisan activity. We do not guarantee it will work for everyone, but we believe it offers one legitimate model for nonprofits that want to educate the community in the midst of an election year.

The most important principle for 501(c) (3) nonprofit organizations to observe is nonpartisanship! It's a principle that people expect us to uphold since the people who share our community service goals come from many different political backgrounds. People want to know that we are fair, that we are evenhanded, and that we don't play favorites or turn away anyone because of their political beliefs. It's also a principle embodied in the tax law that governs nonprofit organizations.

Few possessions are more precious to your nonprofit organization than the scrap of paper from the Internal Revenue Service that gives you 501(c) (3) status, which means that donations to your organization are tax deductible. Most nonprofits could not survive without the IRS status. But if the IRS finds that your organization is acting to support a particular party or candidate, they will take that status away.

Elections are an important part of how our society runs. Helping voters become better informed on the candidates running for office and on the issues vying for attention is a legitimate activity for a nonprofit. However, trying to influence how people vote or helping or harming the interests of a candidate or party is not a legal activity for a tax-exempt nonprofit.

It isn't enough just to avoid putting up signs or passing out fliers in support of one candidate or another. If you set up an event trying to make one candidate look good, or one party look bad, that could be interpreted as partisan activity. You must avoid packing the crowd at an event with one candidate's supporters, or asking loaded questions to make one party's positions look bad. Even the appearance of having done these things can hurt your reputation and take away your nonprofit tax-exempt status. To avoid jeopardizing your 501(c) (3) tax

status, we suggest you follow these guidelines:

- **Which candidates to invite and how to invite them:**

The forum can be limited to candidates representing major parties and significant and serious third party candidates. During a primary season, the forum can be limited to those candidates of one party who are running in the primary. *Just sending out an invitation is not enough.* Be reasonably certain that, through preliminary contact with their campaigns, at least the major party candidates will show up. You may want to make the invitations to the candidates contingent on all of them accepting. Use a phone log for each call made to candidates' offices.

- **What to do if a candidate cancels:** If a candidate cancels at the last minute, strongly urge his or her office to send a staffer or other representative. If a candidate or his or her representative fails to show up, make it clear to the audience that you did everything possible to ensure equal representation. DO NOT use the empty chair tactic; it may be viewed as a partisan setup.

- **Whom to choose as a moderator:** Choose a moderator who is perceived by the community as neutral and who will not favor any particular point of view. An academic or a media personality is often a good choice.

- **How to structure the forum:** We suggest that you have experts on homelessness/housing (including people currently and formerly experiencing homelessness) talk about the homelessness/housing situation instead of having audience members ask specific questions. They may describe what needs to be done, but should not ask for any response from the candidates or put any specific questions to them.

After the panelists speak, give the candidates time to respond to what they have heard. Of course, all candidates must get equal time and should be treated identically and fairly, by the moderator, and by the audience. Remember, your purpose is to educate, not to promote the interests of any candidate or party.

The moderator should be instructed to introduce and close the forum with a statement explaining that the forum has been a nonpartisan community education project and is not designed to favor any candidate or party.

We understand that we are recommending a type of forum

in which the community at large will not have a chance to ask questions or respond from the floor to the candidates. This requires a prepared and tough moderator. It also means that the experts on your panel should be knowledgeable enough so that people in the audience who care about homelessness and housing issues will feel represented by them. We suggest that you plan a reception to follow the event and that you encourage community members to talk one-on-one with the candidates there.

Ensuring a Successful Forum

To host a successful forum, pay special attention to:

- Assembling a representative panel that can talk about local housing and homelessness facts and concerns;
- Taking the time to prepare panelist(s) and the moderator;
- Getting all serious and significant candidates to attend and participate;
- Generating interest among the media about the event;
- Getting the word out to the community;
- Getting commitments from fellow organizers to conduct follow-up to the event.

To get these tasks done, we suggest that you set up a coordinating committee to be responsible for the important decisions and a number of subcommittees to handle the details.

The Coordinating Committee

The coordinating committee should be comprised of representatives from a wide range of local constituencies including: low income people, people currently and formerly homeless, local/statewide housing and homeless coalitions, social worker/provider networks, religious groups, labor unions, low income and consumer groups, senior citizens groups, etc. In order to ensure broad community support, incorporate into the coordinating committee as many diverse groups as possible.

REMEMBER: Make it clear to all the groups invited that the Community/Candidates' Forum is for the discussion of housing and homelessness issues only, not for all of the problems facing the community. This is necessary because no single forum can do justice to more than one issue at a time. It will also help focus

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the comments of panelists and candidates, which in turn will help hold the audience's attention. The committees' responsibilities can include:

- a) Establishing the procedures that will guide the ad-hoc coalition sponsoring the forum
- b) Establishing a time frame in which to accomplish the event (sample enclosed)
- c) Confirming the availability of candidates
- d) Selecting the site, date, and time
- e) Drawing up a budget (suggestion sheet enclosed)
- f) Authorizing the work of subcommittees
- g) Choosing community panelists, such as:
 - People who are currently or formerly experiencing homelessness
 - Community leaders working to end the housing/homelessness crisis
 - Members of social service organizations stretched too thin
 - Union members who are unable to find affordable housing
 - Tenants fighting to preserve their homes
 - Interfaith groups building homes
- h) Choosing a moderator responsible for:
 - Explaining the ground rules to panelists, invited guests, and the audience
 - Being the timekeeper and maintaining order to ensure that the forum runs smoothly
- i) Choosing which candidates to invite. The forum can be limited to candidates representing major parties and significant/serious third party candidates. During the primary season, the forum can be limited to those candidates of one party who are running.
- j) Developing and evaluating follow-up plans.

Subcommittees

The subcommittees you create might include a) public relations/media, b) community outreach, c) liaison with candidates, d) finance, and e) site. Subcommittees allow you to

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both delegate responsibility and involve a wide range of groups in the planning process.

Public Relations/Media Subcommittee:

Responsible for coordinating media coverage for the event and developing media packets. The subcommittee may want to designate a member to act as a resource for the media and general public.

Community Outreach Subcommittee:

Responsible for turning out the community for the event. Remember, the more people who actively participate in planning the event, the easier it will be to turn out a lot of people. Some of the ways this can be accomplished are:

- Requesting promotion from the broadcast community;
- Contacting appropriate individuals and organizations by mail, phone, or in person;
- Developing and distributing flyers and leaflets (sample flyer enclosed);
- Developing small display ads and submitting them to community newspapers in the hope of getting free advertising (modify the enclosed sample flyer to create your own ad).

The subcommittee may want to establish a phone tree/email list or tap into the Coordinating Committee's phone trees/email lists. In addition, this subcommittee might want to take responsibility for setting up transportation networks to help people get to and from the event.

Candidate Liaison Subcommittee:

Responsible for communication with all candidates, including making the initial phone calls to all of the candidates chosen by the Coordinating Committee, keeping a candidates phone log, writing confirmation letters, and being the main contact for the candidates prior to and during the event (sample letter and script enclosed).

Finance Subcommittee:

Responsible for working with the Coordinating Committee to develop a budget and raise funds for the event. Even though you

will want to maximize in-kind contributions to cover educational and publicity materials, reception costs, postage, and other costs, you may find that the act of making some people solely responsible for finances will help generate in-kind contributions.

Site Subcommittee:

Responsible for securing the room, setting up the room prior to the event (arranging furniture, checking microphones/lighting, and hanging banners) and returning the room to its original state after the event. The site should be centrally located and/or near well-traveled streets/highways and/or public transportation. DO NOT commit to a space you can't fill. It's better to have people standing along the walls than have dozens of empty seats.

Planning a Budget

One of the main topics of conversation at your first organizing meeting should be finances: who's willing to pay for what, who can make in-kind donations, etc. Remember to look to social service networks, unions, low-income housing and tenant groups, and the community-at-large (banks, large and small businesses, civic groups, interfaith networks, etc.) to seek funding (in-kind or cash) for the event. A bonus to this is that, as committee members place calls to the community to solicit support, they will also be spreading the word about the event.

Here's a [checklist](#) of some of the items necessary for the forum that may end up costing you money:

Site. One of the coordinating committee members may have access to an appropriate site that you can get for free or for a nominal charge. Meetingrooms in churches, shelters, soup kitchens, or local government buildings are a good bet. Perhaps a local school or college will donate space to you. But if none of these is available, you may have to rent private space, such as a movie theater or banquet hall, in which case you might have to pay up to \$500.

Publicity. You should expect to print at least 1,000 flyers/handbills to publicize the forum. Show your support for organized labor by getting a union printer if one is available. You should expect to spend about five cents a copy. If you don't want to pay for this service, consider making up a master flyer

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on a computer, distributing master originals to participating groups, and asking them to photocopy them on their in-house machines. If your publicity committee makes up small newspaper ads and radio announcements, send copies of them around to community newspapers and local radio stations. You may be surprised at how much free advertising you can get.

Reception. People will remain to discuss the issues if you present them with a nice spread of food and drink. It is generally not a good idea to serve alcohol (and restrictions on the room you're renting may prevent it). Consider asking every member of your various committees to bring some item of food or drink. Ask local businesses to donate items. You will probably have to put out some money for things like plates, cups, utensils, and napkins. Consider drawing up a modest budget for these essentials and then splitting the cost among the participating groups.

Educational Materials. Remember, the forum provides you with an excellent opportunity to distribute educational materials to the participants and the audience. You may want to allow each group to handle its own development and production costs or you might consider producing a joint packet of materials, with the production costs borne equally.

Postage and Mailing Costs. Do not spend a lot of money doing large mailings to publicize the forum. We suggest you rely as heavily as possible on free advertising — but do not discourage the desire of individual groups to publicize the forum to their own members. If they choose to do this, however, they should be prepared to pick up the tab.

Remember, weigh financial questions early and avoid unpleasant surprises. Putting on a community forum will take more time and effort than cash, but the participating groups should be prepared to spend as much as \$1,000 to pull it off.

Suggested Timeline

Week 1

Full Coordinating Committee holds initial meeting

- Establish tentative date and time for event
- Choose type of person(s) for the panelists/moderator
- Agree on ground rules
- Form subcommittees
- Develop Budget

Week 2

Subcommittees hold first meetings

- *Site Committee*: solicits ideas for place
- *Finance Committee*: develops draft budget and solicits ideas on how to fund event
- *Outreach Committee*: prepares list of all endorsing groups to date and develops list of other groups to ask for endorsement; develops draft flyers/leaflets;
- *PR/Media Committee*: drafts news release/PSA Notices
- *Candidate Liaison Committee*: Makes first round of calls

Week 3

Subcommittees continue work

- *Site Committee*: visits possible sites; finalizes time, date, site
- *Finance Committee*: begins calls to identified groups
- *Outreach Committee*: begins calls to panelists
- *PR/Media Committee*: finalizes news releases/PSA Notices and begins media strategy
- *Candidate Liaison Committee*: continues to reach candidates

Week 4

Full committee meets

- Subcommittees report on progress

Subcommittees continue work

- *Site Committee*: finalizes site for event, holds meeting for volunteer recruitment
- *Finance Committee*: continues outreach for funding
- *Outreach Committee*: continues phone calls for advance outreach, confirms panelists/moderator, continues to mail/email out notices to community

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- *PR/Media Committee*: sends out PSAs
- *Candidate Liaison Committee*: meets with staff members

Week 5

Full Committee meets

- Subcommittee report on progress-to-date
- Develop evaluation tool and plan for follow up actions

Subcommittees continue work

- *Site Committee*: finalizes all logistical plans
- *Outreach Committee*: develops and prints event program

Week 6

Full Committee meets to review final details

Week 7

Hold event

Full Committee meets to evaluate event and implement follow-up actions

Sample Phone Script

Hello, my name is (YOUR NAME). I'm working with the (COORDINATING COMMITTEE NAME) planning the Community Candidates' Forum on Homelessness and Housing, to be held on (DATE) at the (PLACE) beginning at (TIME).

The purpose of the event is to bring together a broad range of people who are concerned about the lack of affordable housing and increasing homelessness in our community. We are calling to invite (MEMBER/CANDIDATE NAME) to be part of the event. The Community Forum will begin with citizen testimony from (MENTION A FEW OF THE COMMUNITY PANELISTS). We have asked (MEMBER/CANDIDATE NAMES) to attend. Following the panel presentation each candidate will be able to respond to the panelists' concerns. While we won't entertain questions from the audience, the (MEMBERS/CANDIDATES) will have an opportunity to meet and talk with the community following the event at a reception hosted by the (COORDINATING COMMITTEE NAME). Can I send you a letter listing these details for your consideration?

Sample Community Forum Invitation Letter

DATE

[Insert name and address of candidate]

Thank you for considering being part of the (COORDINATION COMMITTEE NAME) educational public forum and reception on housing and homelessness issues on (DATE). As I discussed on (DATE OF PHONE CALL) with (NAME OF PHONE CONTACT) of your staff both you and (OTHER MEMBERS/CANDIDATES NAMES) have been invited to respond to a panel of community experts on housing and homelessness issues facing (COMMUNITY NAME).

I have enclosed a copy of the agenda and ground rules for the event.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (YOUR PHONE NUMBER). If I do not hear from you by (ONE WEEK AFTER THE DATE OF THE LETTER), I will give your office a call.

We are looking forward to your participation in our event.

Sincerely,

(YOUR NAME)
(COORDINATING COMMITTEE NAME)

PLANNING AND CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE SITE VISIT

Inviting candidates on a tour of your program is a powerful way to move your policy agenda. Public officials are persuaded to take action on policy when they understand the direct impact that policy has on real people and programs. Be prepared to tell personal, organizational, and community-wide stories of success during the visit. You are more likely to gain support from candidates on a particular issue if you demonstrate your organization's ability to make effective use of resources. Site visits are also a great opportunity to bring media attention to the success of your facility.

Scheduling your Site Visit

- Schedule your visit by faxing an invitation (attn: scheduler) to the candidate's office (*See Sample Invitation*).
- Follow up with the scheduler to confirm your meeting. Sometimes candidates are subject to last minute changes so confirm your visit again as it gets closer.

Who to Invite

- Invite a broad spectrum of people to demonstrate widespread support for your program and policy issue. Ideas include: a board member, local/state elected officials, service providers, consumers, or someone who has a relationship with your candidate already.
- Invite local media to give you and your candidate positive press attention.

Preparing for the Site Visit

- Determine your message and which policy issue you want to push during the visit.
- Prepare an agenda with a strategic route that allows them to talk with particular staff and clients. Identify speakers who will be "on message".
- Make sure a consumer prepares a story of how your program impacted their success (*See: Telling Your Story*).
- Prepare handouts of materials about your program and your policy agenda.

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- **PRACTICE.** Make sure speakers are prepared. It is important that the visit be brief and focused on your message.

Things to Remember During the Visit

- Points made during the visit should be “on message” with your policy request.
- Continuously make the connection between what the candidate is seeing and the policy issue you are advocating.
- Take pictures with your candidate and attendees.
- Ask your candidate to take specific action in support of the policy issue (in this case, ask them to pledge to prioritize the Five Fundamentals).
- Ask when and who you should follow up with on what you have asked him/her to do.

Follow up

- Send a thank you note summarizing what action you have asked him/her to take and how this will affect your program and homelessness in your community.
- Put pictures from the visit in your newsletter and add their office to your mailing list.
- Call the candidate’s staff person you were told to follow up with at the time suggested, send any information requested on the site visit and answer any unanswered questions that were asked by your candidate on the visit.
- Continue to follow up on your policy request with letters, phone calls, meetings, and media outreach.

Sample Site Visit Invitation Letter

Dear XX
[Address]
Attn: XX [Scheduler]
CC: XX [Staff who works on Housing or Homeless Issues, if applicable]
Fax: XX

Dear XX,

I am writing on behalf of [Agency/Organization] to invite you to visit [Event you want them to visit and date].

[Please include personal information that will explain why the candidate's leadership in office is important to your work. For example, you could:

- Describe your program and how it helps people experiencing homelessness.
- Thank the candidate for any efforts that he/she personally or his/her office has made on your behalf, including local issues and / or federal policy.
- Tell a story of how you or a client who is / was homeless turned his / her life around. Include a sentence saying, "My story or my client's story demonstrates how critical it is that you are a champion in public office on ending homelessness."
- Describe a policy issue you will discuss during the site visit and how it impacts your organization.]

It would be an honor to have you visit our program to learn more about the work being done to end homelessness in [State/District/Town]. Thank you for your continued support. Ending homelessness will result in healthier, safer, and improved communities.

Sincerely,

XX

CANDIDATE HOMELESS CHALLENGE

The goal of the Candidate Homeless Challenge is for candidates for public office at all levels of government to witness first-hand how public policy decisions affect people experiencing homelessness. As Clemmie Greenlee, one of the formerly homeless organizers of the Nashville Mayoral Urban Plunge put it, *"We want them to understand that it's not fair for anyone to sit around and watch as human beings live a Third World life."*

Homeless Challenge: The challenge is typically for 48 hours, in which participants dress down, give up their privileges, and plunge into life on the streets. During the day participants are grouped in pairs. These pairs eat at soup kitchens and panhandle, among other suggested activities. At night they meet up with a guide (a homeless or formerly homeless person). This is an opportunity to speak with a person who is "living the homeless life," as well as share their daily experiences with a "qualified" facilitator for discussion and with fellow "plungers". The challenge can also be done in 24 hours.

Walk a Mile in My Shoes: Candidate/public officials are paired one-on-one with homeless or formerly homeless persons. They spend half the day or the entire day together. They eat lunch at a soup kitchen together, share where they sleep for the night, and try to access services. It is an opportunity for the participant to have quality time with a homeless person and to share his/her struggles and customs while living on the streets. It is likely that we will pair a public official with a homeless person or family for the month, meeting once or twice during that time.

For more information regarding any of these challenges please contact: Homeless Challenge Project Coordinator, National Coalition for the Homeless, 202-462-4822, www.nationalhomeless.org

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
[Date]

Contact: [name and phone #
of your group's
press contact

Local Candidates Pledge to Prevent and End Mass Homelessness

[Insert name of city in which the release is being issued] – [insert #] candidates for public offices representing [insert name of geographic area] have pledged to take action to prevent and end mass homelessness. The candidates have acted in response to a request from [insert name of requesting organization] that they endorse a consensus statement on solutions to homelessness developed by an assembly of national organizations.

Candidates taking the pledge include: [Insert names of candidates taking the pledge and the offices for which each is seeking]

The consensus statement identifies the solutions to homelessness as:

- Renew key federal homeless assistance programs by Congress
- Increase the supply of affordable housing
- Provide health care, education, and social services to all who need them
- Assure incomes sufficient to pay for the necessities of life
- Prevent discrimination against homeless persons.

Candidates across the country are being asked to endorse the consensus statement as a demonstration that political will exists to address the causes and consequences of homelessness, a socioeconomic condition experienced by 3.5 million Americans annually.

[Insert quote from organization spokesperson here, such as “We are pleased that several candidates for public offices representing our community have taken the pledge to make homelessness one of their priority issues if elected. We urge

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more candidates to join the growing movement to prevent and end homelessness, once and for all," said XX].

[Insert two-sentence description of your organization here]

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FIVE FUNDAMENTALS CAMPAIGN ACTION REPORT FORM

Report Information			
Name:		Organization:	
Phone:		E-mail:	
Address:		Website:	

Actions Taken to Support the Five Fundamentals Campaign (check all that apply):

Sent Five Fundamental Challenge Letters to Candidates

Sent Action Alert to Members/Friends

Organized Hosted Candidates Forum on Homelessness

Attended Candidates' Campaign Events

Hosted Homeless Program Site Visit for Candidates

Organized Candidate Homeless Challenge

Other Action Item (Describe below)

Explain: _____

Candidates Pledged to Support the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness (use additional pages as necessary). Please attach completed pledge forms.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Please Complete and Return Form to:

National Coalition for the Homeless
2201 P St NW
Washington DC 20037

Fax: (202) 462-4823

E-mail: info@nationalhomeless.org