

September 16, 2011

Senator Patty Murray  
448 Senate Russell Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Jeb Hensarling  
129 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Max Baucus  
511 Senate Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Xavier Becerra  
1226 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Senator John Kerry  
218 Senate Russell Office Building  
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Representative David Camp  
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Senator Jon Kyl  
730 Senate Hart Office Building  
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Representative James Clyburn  
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Senator Robert Portman  
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Representative Fred Upton  
2183 Rayburn House Office Building  
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Senator Pat Toomey  
B40B Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Christopher Van Hollen  
1707 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction:

The Homeless Advocates Group, a coalition of 27 national non-profit organizations committed to ending homelessness in America by improving federal housing and services policy targeting homeless families, individuals and youth, recognizes the choices before the Committee are difficult ones. This letter explains the negative impact cuts to discretionary and mandatory programs addressing homelessness will have on both our ability to successfully end homelessness and reduce costs to public systems.

As you begin your work on the Committee, we ask you to take a strong stance to do no harm to individuals and families experiencing or at high risk of homelessness by weakening the discretionary and entitlement programs that serve them. The economic conditions of the past several years have led to rising unemployment, loss of health insurance, higher housing costs, and a diminished ability to meet basic needs for many in our communities. As a result, more and more Americans are far less secure and homelessness is rising, especially among families with children. The fiscal strategies to date have been to cut domestic programs, leaving scant protection for those who depend on them for survival. **We call on you to stop the cycle of cuts to safety net programs.**

Mass homelessness has been a fixture on the American landscape since the early 1980's, with at least 1.6 million individuals experiencing homelessness in 2010, according to HUD. Lack of stable housing has severe consequences – chronic health problems, premature death, lost productivity, family instability, and weakened communities. Numerous research studies and evaluations have shown that reducing investments in permanent solutions to homelessness, especially chronic homelessness, actually results in higher public costs. With bipartisan support from Congress, local communities across the country have realized costs savings by investing in the services that end people cycling from the streets to emergency rooms to jail and back to the street. These solutions

are cited in the 2010 Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. This plan was produced by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness in recognition and continuation of the prior Administration's aggressive commitment to ending homelessness. Access to affordable housing, health insurance, primary care services, mental health services, substance use treatment and general support services can not only end today's homelessness and prevent future homelessness, but also reduce public costs for those who frequently and inappropriately use emergency rooms, hospitals, and the criminal justice system. It is critical that the Joint Select Committee make choices that do not lead to increases in homelessness and local public system costs.

The discretionary caps enacted through the Budget Control Act as well as the enacted FY11 budget have already reduced domestic programs and disproportionately impacted low-income and homeless individuals and families. These citizens are simply not able to bear any additional burdens from the deficit reduction proposal developed by the Committee. We recommend the following to ensure continued commitment to preventing and ending homelessness:

- **Do not cut domestic discretionary spending for affordable housing programs or those targeted to homeless and at-risk populations.** Further cuts beyond those contained in the Budget Control act would decimate safety net housing and health care programs. These programs provide critical services to millions, reduce public costs, and generate jobs and economic activity. A deficit reduction plan relying on additional domestic discretionary cuts will only raise public costs while pushing more people into homelessness.
- **Do not cut or alter the basic structure of Medicaid.** Medicaid covers nearly 60 million low-income seniors, children, pregnant women, and individuals with disabilities and has been essential to mitigating the impact of the recession. Access to such mainstream benefits is also critical to reducing the incidence of homelessness. Any cuts or changes – through block grants, a blended FMAP, or other means – will swell the ranks of the uninsured, burden disabled people, and simply shift costs to states, consumers, and providers.
- **Protect the safety net by including new revenues in the deficit reduction plan.** Considering the magnitude of reductions required, a deficit reduction plan based entirely on cuts would devastate domestic programs. The inclusion of additional revenues in the deficit reduction plan is the only responsible way forward. Revenue increases need not harm the economy, but massive cuts to programs serving low-income individuals and families, on the other hand, will directly harm communities, eliminate jobs, and slow our economic recovery.

**The challenges facing our nation are significant and our deficit needs to be addressed; however, the solution is not cuts to programs fundamental to the survival of so many.** Issues of homelessness, housing, and health care are historically bipartisan and impact every Congressional jurisdiction. The protection of discretionary and entitlement programs that address these pervasive problems should be a guiding principle of your work. The indiscriminate and severe cuts promised by the sequester would not exempt low-income housing or homelessness programs and must also be avoided.

Thank you for your consideration of these views. Members of our organizations stand ready to provide additional information about the importance of reducing the incidence of homelessness and are eager to assist in your efforts. Please contact Jeremy Rosen at [rosen@nlchp.org](mailto:rosen@nlchp.org) or 202-638-2535 with questions for any members of the coalition.

Sincerely,

Community Solutions  
Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Covenant House International  
Family Promise  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Give US Your Poor: The Campaign to End Homelessness  
National AIDS Housing Coalition  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to End Homelessness  
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
National Center for Housing and Child Welfare  
National Center on Family Homelessness  
National Health Care for the Homeless Council  
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty  
National Low-Income Housing Coalition  
National Network for Youth  
Partnering for Change: The National Institute for Innovative Strategies to Combat Family  
Homelessness and Poverty  
Western Regional Advocacy Project