



Help the Hawaii Homeless
1777 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 111-#89,
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815 808.271.8054
thehawaiihomeless.org tisha@thehawaiihomeless.org

House Committee on Housing
Representative Rida Cabanilla, Chair
Representative Pono Chong, Vice Chair
March 23, 2011, 9:00 a.m. Room 325

LATE TESTIMONY

RE: Testimony in support of HCR142/ HR124

Chair Cabanilla, Vice Chair Chong and members of the Housing Committee,

The "not-in-my-backyard" or NIMBY attitude has had a very deleterious effect on efforts to solve the issue of homelessness in Hawaii. My organization, Help the Hawaii Homeless has experienced such effects as we have reunited some of our homeless neighbors with their ohana back in their home state. Lack of sufficient coverage about the benefits to Hawaii has made it difficult to gain the public's awareness, and support for our organization and legislator's efforts. In fact, it only takes one poor article from the media to spread virally through the internet to discredit our efforts to help the homeless, without opportunity for defense.

The use of PSA's through all media to educate Hawaii about caring for the less fortunate as our own family is **shamefully** necessary in the Aloha State. Innovative laws, programs and facilities to care for the homeless are shot down because there is no thorough understanding of the issues by all language groups. Unfortunately, nonprofit organizations are limited with funds and depend on the assistance of all media to collaborate for solutions in the escalating homeless crisis.

We would appreciate the cooperation of all media so that everyone can benefit from accurate information and education. For example, the Family Reunification Bill, revised as the Return to Home Program Bill, has taken years to gain support in the legislature due to some negative and misleading coverage in the media. Yet, it will save Hawaii hundreds of thousands in TANF benefits, in addition to funds from nonprofit agencies, that many poor families need **NOW**.

Giving organizations that assist the homeless opportunities to properly educate the public through the media may help to eradicate homelessness and poverty in Hawaii. It is our hope that all of Hawaii can kokua our homeless ohana in their time of need, as each of us is subject to such disasters in life.

Mahalo for hearing my testimony,

Tisha Woytenko
President & Volunteer Executive Director
Help the Hawaii Homeless

March 22, 2011

Chair Rida Cabanilla and Committee members
House Housing Committee
Hawaii State House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 442
Honolulu, HI 96813

LATE TESTIMONY

RE: HCR142, URGING HAWAII TELEVISION, RADIO AND PRINT MEDIA OUTLETS TO ADDRESS THE "NOT IN MY BACK YARD" (NIMBY) ATTITUDE IN HAWAII.

Dear Chair Cabanilla, Vice Chair Chong, Representatives Hanohano, Mizuno, Carroll, Herkes, Oshiro, Souki, and additional Committee members:

This testimony is in strong support of HCR142.

For those who are homeless in Hawaii, particularly individuals unable to make sound decisions on their own behalf, I believe that all members of the community have a responsibility to help. Unfortunately due to stigma, fear, and discrimination, "NIMBYISM" has been alive and well, and has prevented positive ventures from moving forward that can benefit everyone involved.

Our media can be a powerful advocate in this effort. By providing the facts, people can be educated and thereby encouraged to develop and support rational initiatives.

Awareness of the phenomenal costs associated with homelessness alone can be enlightening. This in turn can help people to be more open to solutions such as Housing First, which save a great deal of money in addition to being the right thing to do. The following document outlines specifics in terms of the costs of homelessness.

Mahalo for your efforts to help those who are less fortunate, and for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Pamela Menter

WHAT IS THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS?

The cost of homelessness can be quite high, particularly for those with chronic illnesses. Because they have no regular place to stay, people who are homeless use a variety of public systems in an inefficient and costly way. Preventing a homeless episode or ensuring a speedy transition into stable permanent housing can result in a significant cost savings.

Comparison of Average Public Cost of an Unsheltered Homeless Person and a Resident in Supportive Housing¹

The average public cost for an unsheltered homeless person is \$2,897 per month. In comparison, the average public cost for a resident in supportive housing is \$605 per month. By providing supportive housing with supportive services, public costs can be decreased by 79%.

Public costs for unsheltered homeless individuals vary by age, gender and individual attributes. Public costs increase for unsheltered homeless if they are older, unemployed, disabled, suffering from mental illness, or are substance abusers.

- Single unsheltered adults between 18 to 29 years of age who have no jail history, no substance abuse problems or mental illness, and are not disabled cost an average of \$406 a month.
- Single unsheltered adults 46 years old or older who also have substance abuse issues or mental illness with no recent employment history cost an average of \$5,038 a month.
- Public costs for homeless men are 40 percent higher than for homeless women on average.

Average Cost of Public Services Provided to a Person Who is Homeless in Hawaii

Health Care Costs - 38% of all public costs for those who are unsheltered are health care costs. A study of hospital admissions of homeless people in Hawaii revealed that 1,751 adults were responsible for 564 hospitalizations and \$4 million in admission costs. Their rate of psychiatric hospitalization was over 100 times their non-homeless cohort. The researchers conducting the study estimate that the excess cost for treating these homeless individuals was \$3.5 million or about **\$2,000 per person.**²

- Average cost for substance abuse treatment for a homeless person in Hawaii **\$4801.96**³
- Average ER Visit for non-urgent medical treatment in Hawaii **\$830 per visit**⁴
- Average cost of a hospital stay in Hawaii **\$4,519 per day**⁵
- Average cost of imprisonment in Hawaii **\$41,273 a year per inmate, or \$113 per day.**⁶

¹ "Where We Sleep, Cost When Homeless and Housed in Los Angeles" 2009, A full copy of this report can be downloaded from <http://www.economicrt.org>

² From (Martell J.V., Seitz R.S., Harada J.K., Kobayashi J., Sasaki V.K., Wong C. Hospitalization in an urban homeless population: the Honolulu Urban Homeless Project. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 1992; 116:299-303).

³ Calculated from Lai, M.C., Yuen, S., Yuan, S., Zhang, J., & Okano, S.Y. (2009). Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services Report: Hawai'i, 2000 – 2008. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Center on the Family.

⁴ "Potential Savings through Reduction of Inappropriate ER Utilization in Hawaii" by Josh Green, MD, State Senator, ER physician and Medical Director of the Hawaii IPA.

⁵ Pacific Business News: <http://www.bizjournals.com/pacific/stories/2008/10/27/story2.html>, Sunday October 26, 2008.

⁶ Calculated from "Prisoners in 2009" by William J. Sabol, Ph.D., Heather C. West, Ph.D., Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2232>