



**New Jersey Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness
March 25, 2014 Public Hearing**

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Good Afternoon Commissioners Constable and Velez, and Interagency Council Members,

My name is Jay Everett from Monarch Housing Associates. Thank you for all the hard work you are doing to shape policies around effective solutions for housing and serving those who are experiencing homelessness in our communities. We hope that the recommendations of this body will empower communities and agencies all over our state to implement proven strategies that will prevent, and ultimately, end homelessness in New Jersey.

One such proven strategy is called the ‘Housing First’ approach. Just as its name implies, Housing First is an evidence-based best practice that provides permanent housing to homeless households as quickly as possible and then wraps supportive services around them as needed.

The objectives and desired outcomes of the Housing First approach are to:

- reduce the length of time that households spend homeless or prevent homelessness for households at imminent risk;
- increase the number of households who obtain permanent housing or the rate at which households obtain permanent housing;
- increase the number of households who obtain needed supports to maintain their housing; and
- increase the number of families stabilized in permanent housing over time. (*Organizational Change: Adopting a Housing First Approach*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. July 2009)

When homeless households and individuals spend a shorter amount of time in emergency shelter, and are given permanent housing with appropriate services that meet their individual needs to maintain their stability, this reduces the effects of the trauma and vulnerability that are part of anyone’s experience of homelessness. When housing and services are timely, the reduced vulnerability of households means that they do not need to draw heavily on other community resources such as emergency rooms, psychiatric hospitals, jails, and substance abuse treatment

Programs. In fact, studies show that in some communities, supportive housing can reduce the cost of other services for persons experiencing homelessness by 39% and even greater over the long-term. (“Supportive Housing Means Less

Time in Mental Health, Nursing Homes, Prisons,” Heartland Alliance Mid-America Institute on Poverty, Apr. 2009.)

Within this model, housing is not contingent upon participation in services, so it can effectively target even those who are the most difficult to serve and house stably. The Housing First model has proven effective in housing a wide variety of homeless population subsets including chronically homeless households and families and the general homeless population. Reaching the most vulnerable is not only the right thing to do, but it also the most cost-effective thing to do.

But, perhaps the most compelling aspect of Housing First is that it effectively ends homelessness for those who need it, with 85% of participants maintaining housing stability.

The State of New Jersey should adopt housing first as its primary housing and supportive services strategy for ending homelessness. The state can also ensure that all agencies receiving state contracts for service funding are required to serve the most difficult to house homeless and focus their resources on solutions that work, while encouraging well-designed innovations for continuous improvement.

Thank You.