



New Jersey Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness
March 25, 2014
Testimony of Joyce Campbell, Associate Executive Director
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton

On behalf of those we serve at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton I extend our appreciation for this opportunity to speak to the council. We want to share both our successes and challenges in helping the individuals and families who come to our doors homeless or on the brink of homelessness. Catholic Charities provides a continuum of housing programs from emergency shelter to permanent supportive housing. We work alongside many of those who are here today in finding solutions to ensure everyone has a place to call home. And, I doubt that there will be little to nothing said here today that we would not agree with.

We believe, first and foremost, that the state must adopt a housing first and rapid rehousing policy as the primary response to homelessness. That's not to say there are not other forms of housing that are needed by some populations, but the main concept here is that those who are homeless or on the brink have a right to a home and a right to not have to jump through hoops or wait years to get that home.

Catholic Charities has worked integrally with Mercer County in its efforts to make a system change to rapid rehousing versus transitional housing. We have data that can be shared that shows not only does rapid re-housing decrease the amount of public assistance spent per family by 50%, but also does so in less time, and provides longer housing stability. We call upon the council to recommend that this become common practice, and create uniformity amongst the counties in the state. It's not an easy transition but one that can be done with support and direction.

This is not to say that there are not barriers or challenges in rapid re-housing. The first is that in Mercer those who participated were welfare eligible so that emergency assistance (EA) dollars could be used. EA leaves a lot of individuals and families falling through the cracks into homelessness, because, while they may have an income too high for welfare, it's certainly not high enough to pay for market rate housing. The council would be wise to look at how the working poor can be better embraced in the homeless system, perhaps changing how emergency assistance is provided.

Finally, the lack of affordable housing options challenges the success of any program. We know that rental assistance works, so that we call for a significant increase in State Rental Assistance Program vouchers. In addition, making homelessness a priority for public housing - whose primary purpose was always to serve those with low incomes-would provide additional units. Catholic Charities and its partners here today do believe there are solutions, ones that may not, in the end cost more and could provide a home to all. We urge you to consider those solutions. Thank you.

Joyce Campbell, jcampbell@cctrenton.org