

December __, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
United States House
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Walsh
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
United States House
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators/Representatives:

We, the undersigned organizations, thank you for past Committee investments in mental health and substance use services for homeless populations and ask that in the 2009 appropriations legislation for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education programs you include the **House subcommittee recommendation amount of \$77,306,000 for SAMHSA PRNS homelessness activities.**¹ In addition, we ask that report language be included **expressing the Committee's support for the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) initiative** and giving direction to SAMHSA to continue funding this program.

The recent economic downturn is already fraying the support networks available to America's most vulnerable citizens. The SAMHSA PRNS funding will provide a lifeline to people with mental health and substance use disabilities who are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Current investments by SAMHSA in homeless programs are highly effective, cost efficient, and fill a gap created by a federal preference for funding housing capital needs over critically important services. In addition to treatment, increasing client's income is a vitally

¹ Specifically, the House Committee Report recommends \$75,000,000 funding within SAMHSA's PRNS budgets for homelessness activities. The Committee requests \$32,250,000 in the CMHS PRNS category for "Homelessness Prevention Programs. The Homelessness Prevention program continues the work of the Grants to Benefit Homeless Individuals (GBHI) by funding grants to States and communities to expand and strengthen their services for persons who are homeless and have mental health disorders, or co-occurring illnesses.

The House Report requests \$42,750,000 for "Treatment Systems for Homeless" in the CSAT budget PRNS category. The House Committee also requests \$2,306,000 for "Homelessness," in the CMHS PRNS category.

The Senate Report includes \$42,500,000 in SAMHSA PRNS homeless activities.

important step toward self-sufficiency. SOAR is a proven strategy that helps people experiencing homelessness access the federal disability benefits for which they are eligible but face barriers to receiving. Initial acceptance rates for SSI/SSDI at sites using the SOAR approach are now at 70% and occurring in an average of 93 days. For clients who do not have access to the SOAR approach, the application process can take months and it is not uncommon for it to take an unconscionable 2-3 years. During this wait, people are often without any resources or income, including health insurance and a means to meet basic needs.

SAMHSA's homeless programs have a proven ability to connect with local homeless providers and initiate the integration of community-based systems. As organizations working with those experiencing homelessness who also have mental health and substance use challenges, this investment will move us forward in our efforts to end homelessness. Quality treatment services, access to disability benefits and stronger connections with medical and other social supports are essential to helping our clients who are homeless acquire and maintain housing.

Once again we commend your past efforts to provide funding for these vital life-changing and life saving programs and ask for your continued support.

Sincerely,