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United Way of
Metropolitan Atlanta

Support for State FY09 Requested Budget Appropriation

Georgia Department of Community Affairs State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless: Enhancement of \$1.5 million for Housing Service Specialists

WHY THIS ENHANCEMENT IS CRITICAL

Homelessness is not only a human tragedy, it's expensive! Some 27,161 homeless Georgians were documented in 2006 by or through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, about half with mental and/or addictive disorders who had been homeless for a year or longer. Repeated encounters with emergency rooms, law enforcement, jails, prisons and mental hospitals add up. A study of hospital utilization by the Athens-Clarke County Department of Human and Economic Development found that 891 homeless individuals made 7,000 visits to two regional hospitals during 2005 totaling \$12,378,000 in expenses borne by taxpayers. That's \$13, 892 per homeless individual in medical costs alone.

The National Governor's Association and other groups promote housing placements that incorporate services to help residents achieve stability, recovery and independence as "best practice" in ending homelessness and achieving cost savings. For example, a study by the Lewin Group identified average daily costs in Atlanta during 2004 for a variety of settings often associated with the homeless: \$55 for a jail placement, \$47 for a prison placement, \$335 for placement in a mental health hospital and \$1,637 for placement in an acute care hospital. In contrast, the average cost of a supportive housing placement was \$33 per day or \$12, 045 a year.

This proposed investment of an additional \$1.5 million in the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless will make supportive housing placements effective and, combined with local matching dollars, is anticipated to yield more than four times this amount in savings to Georgia.

GEORGIA CANNOT END HOMELESSNESS WITHOUT THIS ENHANCEMENT

New challenges have emerged in efforts to achieve Georgia's goal of ending homelessness by 2012. Funding received through the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development to offset the cost of support services is restricted and federal regulatory constraints associated with behavioral health services offered through state Medicaid programs have reduced the ability to fund interventions not considered medically diagnostic or therapeutic in nature. Upon documenting this service gap, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Department of Human Resources jointly developed this enhancement request.

The requested dollars would, with a local match, fund Housing Support Specialists to serve an estimated 1,000 homeless clients at any given time. While not considered medical in nature, the services to be provided are nevertheless essential to stabilizing the homeless and facilitating independence. Examples include outreach to engage clients in recovery, the development of a housing service plan, regular supervision, life skill training, and ongoing connection to appropriate medical, mental health, job training other mainstream services.

HOW OTHERS CAN SUPPORT THIS APPROPRIATION REQUEST

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Department of Human Resources developed this appropriation request in consultation with the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta's Regional Commission on Homelessness. We are deeply appreciative of the Governor Perdue for recommending the enhancement in his FY 09 State Budget Proposal. Please thank Governor Perdue for recognizing the challenges faced in ending homelessness: telephone 404-656-1776 or e-mail via <http://www.gov.state.ga.us>. In addition, please discuss the need for this appropriation with your legislators who may be found via the Georgia General Assembly's website: <http://www.legis.state.ga.us>. This appropriation is now under consideration by the Appropriations Subcommittees for Economic Development chaired by Rep. Carl Rogers (26th) in the House and Sen. Chip Pearson (51st) in the Senate. The final budget adopted by the legislature will be through a conference committee of House and Senate leaders.

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HOW THIS ENHANCEMENT WOULD BE ADMINISTERED

The State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless, an independent entity administratively attached to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs created by state statute (O.C.G.A. § 8-3-5), will administer the enhancement in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources and other members of Governor Perdue's State Homeless Interagency Coordination Council.

Fund Distribution: Funding will be made available statewide by application directly from organizations endorsed by Continuums of Care (CoC), designated collaboratives of public and nonprofit agencies that develop community plans to meet the needs of the homeless as they transition from emergency shelter, transitional housing to permanent housing and maximum self-sufficiency. Currently, there are six local CoCs serving Athens-Clarke; Atlanta, Fulton & DeKalb; Augusta-Richmond; Cobb; Columbus-Muscogee, and Savannah-Chatham. The CoC serving all other jurisdictions is the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority. Awards of state dollars will require locally identified match on a scale to be determined by the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless Commission.

Providers Eligible for Funding: Providers either accredited or working towards accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations (JCAHO), the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) or the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children (COA) will be deemed eligible to receive funds. For applicants that do not meet any of these standards, certification requirements will be developed jointly by the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless and DHR's Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Disease.

Housing Support Specialist Standards: Housing Support Specialists will be required to have a high school diploma, complete a specially designed training program and work under the supervision of a licensed behavioral health or social work professional, which may be funded by another program.

Training: The required training program for Housing Support Specialists will be developed by the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless and DHR's Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Disease in collaboration with schools of social work within the Georgia University System. Existing curricula such as that available through the Georgia Certified Peer Specialist Project will be maximized to ensure that workers can readily identify signs of disability and service needs, refer participants to appropriate professional assessments, and assist them in accessing mainstream services and benefits.

Service Expectations: Each Housing Support Specialist will serve 10-30 individuals, depending upon project type and participants' level of stability and service needs. Progress will be tracked through regular review of individual housing service plans and clients will receive aftercare service to ensure that long-term housing stability has been achieved. Housing Support Specialists will also provide the State Interagency Homeless Coordination Council with information regarding service gaps.

Evaluation: The effectiveness of the Housing Support Specialists will be evaluated at the end of one year, with a broader evaluation of the program after three years to determine the extent to which clients served achieve residential stability and have reduced taxpayer costs associated with law enforcement, detention and hospitalization.

HOW ARE SERVICES FOR THE HOMELESS FUNDED IN GEORGIA?

Primary funding runs through the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless and currently includes:

- \$12 million in federal dollars received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority
- \$3 million in existing state dollars appropriated to the State Housing Trust Fund for the Homeless

In addition to federal and state dollars, local governments and nonprofit organizations also make significant contributions to ending homelessness each year. For example, the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta's Regional Commission on Homelessness leveraged \$14 million in its most recently completed fiscal year and has developed over 1,050 units of supportive housing.

The United Way Metropolitan Atlanta rose to Mayor Shirley Franklin's request for concerted leadership in ending homelessness in 2002 by convening the Regional Commission on Homelessness, which now includes participation by seven county governments in addition to the City of Atlanta. Chaired by retired King & Spalding partner Horace Sibley, the Commission has raised \$25 million in private funds since its inception.