



Washington State Coalition  
for the  
**Homeless**

## 2010 Legislative Agenda

*The Washington State Coalition for the Homeless (WSCH) has adopted the following legislative agenda for the 2010 supplemental session to ensure that basic housing and survival needs are met to the greatest extent possible.*

### Our Mission is to End Homelessness

We work to accomplish our mission by:

**Advocating** for funding and policy changes at the state and federal levels that address the root causes of homelessness;

**Increasing capacity** of homeless housing and service providers through training and education; and

**Convening Ten-Year Plan groups** and assisting with the development and implementation of local and statewide plans to end homelessness.

Our board of directors represents housing and service providers, ten-year plan groups and continuum of care groups from every county in the state.

According to the January 2009 Point in Time Count, there were a total of 22,827 people in Washington State reported as homeless. During the 2007-2008 school year, 18,670 K-12 school children and their families experienced homelessness. Over the course of 2009, it is estimated that over 102,000 people will face homelessness.

We work year round to retain the level of housing and services currently available to homeless and at risk households and expand these resources where possible.

#### Statement of Principle:

Washington State needs a stable, progressive, diversified revenue source.

Tax reform will not only create additional and more stable funding for homeless programs, it will help low income people achieve self sufficiency.

[www.EndHomelessnessWA.org](http://www.EndHomelessnessWA.org)  
(253) 761-7446

Tera Bianchi, Interim Advocacy Coordinator  
[tera.bia@gmail.com](mailto:tera.bia@gmail.com)

Seth Dawson, Lobbyist  
[seth@worldnet.att.net](mailto:seth@worldnet.att.net)

### Lead Items

#### Improve care for vulnerable homeless people while reducing state expenditures.

A new, annual investment of \$1 million in the Home Security Fund will allow for the creation and ongoing operation of two new targeted supportive housing projects for the highest utilizers of public crisis services. The projects will be geographically dispersed and will have 50 units each. The state investment will be used to cover on-site services costs in the projects. Providing this supportive housing for this population will result in one-year cost offsets of approximately \$42,000 per person served, for a total savings of more than \$4 million. \$2.4 million of this would be in lower Medicaid payments to health care providers.

#### Increase the Department of Commerce's spending authority within the Home Security Fund by \$6 million.

Due to a technicality in the last legislative session, \$6 million will be left unspent in the Home Security Fund. Fixing this error will not cost any money, it will simply free up existing money in the account to help alleviate a \$9.3 million funding shortfall for the Homeless Grant Assistance Program (HGAP). Failing to address this shortfall will undermine existing, innovative HGAP projects that are already demonstrating cost effective ways of reducing homelessness.

#### End homelessness for homeless families with children by authorizing an allocation of \$6 million for the Washington Families Fund.

In 2004 the Washington State Legislature created the Washington Families Fund, an innovative public-private partnership dedicated to funding services to help homeless families. The Fund supports affordable housing paired with supportive services including job training, parenting classes, and financial planning that help connect families to the opportunities they need to stabilize their lives and become self sufficient. Since 2004, Washington Families Fund programs have served 626 homeless families—composed of 736 adults and 1,210 children.

#### Promote systems coordination and cost savings by planning for the housing needs of individuals exiting state systems of care.

Unfortunately, many individuals leaving Washington State corrections, mental health, foster care and juvenile justice systems have nowhere to go upon discharge. Allowing these individuals to become and remain homeless puts undue strain on publicly funded emergency and law enforcement systems and the homeless system, increases recidivism, and greatly increases the likelihood that children of these individuals will become homeless in their lives. In order to reduce costs and provide sufficient opportunities for success, the State should identify the strategies necessary to stop the practice of releasing people into homelessness.

#### Prevent homelessness and reduce the demand for emergency shelter and homeless prevention funds by increasing the notice that landlords must give when terminating a month-to-month tenancy without cause.

Washington law currently allows landlords to evict tenants these tenants with as little as 20 days written notice. We are proposing to increase the notice to 30 days for all month-to-month tenants being evicted without cause; and 60 days for those who have rented a dwelling unit for twelve months or more. Last year, the Legislature increased the notice to 60 days for tenants in foreclosed rental properties. This bill would extend this protection to those tenants who have met their obligations as a tenant for twelve months or more and is similar to laws now in place in California and Oregon.

## Support Items

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**Preserve General Assistance Unemployable.** All of us hope that if we become disabled or struggle with a mental illness that we will have the economic security and support we need to recover, get back to work, and maintain a modest quality of life. By providing small monthly cash grants and medical coverage for disabled adults who are unable to work, GA-U is a disability lifeline, often the difference between housing and homelessness, between a meal and going hungry. 50,000 people per year rely on GA-U to pay rent, cover critical medications, and pay for basic needs. Cutting GA-U would increase homelessness, hunger and usage of hospital emergency services. This will ultimately cost the state more and could cost people's lives.

**Increase the supply of affordable housing by maintaining the Housing Trust Fund at \$200 million; and ensure the Housing Trust Fund continues to serve those most in need by increasing the Operations and Maintenance Fund.** The Housing Trust Fund serves low- and moderate- income families and individuals, like entry-level teachers, service workers, and people leaving homelessness. More than 70% of Trust Fund units serve extremely low-income people, making it a vital resource in the fight to end homelessness.

**Add homeless as a protected class under the Malicious Harassment statute.** Currently, it is a Class C Felony to injure, damage property or threaten a person because of their actual or perceived race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, or sensory handicap. This law would also protect people who are homeless or perceived to be homeless.

**Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act.** Due to a gap in regulation there is no framework that establishes fairness and consistency in the tenant screening industry. Homeless and low-income renters routinely pay for screening reports that they never get to see which improperly denies them housing for reasons that they never get to know. The law does not require the reports to be disclosed to the potential tenant, who are often denied because of public records that contain incomplete, inaccurate or misleading information. The Fair Tenant Screening Act would allow tenants to pay once for a screening report and be able to use it again within a 60 day period, remove misleading information from their records, and prohibit tenant screening companies from including inaccurate information in the screening report.

**Increase access to market-rate housing for low income tenants by ending source of income discrimination in housing.** Tenant-based rental assistance is Washington's largest source of affordable housing. Renters from across the state rely on this support to stabilize their lives, raise families and engage in their communities. We should ensure that people in need of housing assistance are able to effectively utilize section 8 vouchers and other forms of government assistance that help them pay the rent.

### Improve Access to and Quality of Mainstream Services

We must maintain or increase the funding for the following programs if we are to eliminate homelessness in the State of Washington:

Emergency Food Assistance Program	Basic Health Care
Emergency Shelter and Homeless Assistance Program	Job Training
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	
Transitional Housing Operating and Rent Program	
Food Stamps	
Subsidized Child Care	
Medicaid	
Prevention of Domestic Violence	
GAU/GAX	
Mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment	