

Capitol Hill Day 2011: Report and Summary

National Alliance to End Homelessness

August 2011

Prepared by:

Amanda Krusemark, Director of Policy Outreach

Kate Seif, Assistant to the President



Executive Summary

Every year, Capitol Hill Day – held in conjunction with the Alliance’s annual *National Conference on Ending Homelessness* – offers a time for constituents from across the country to meet with their U.S. Senators and Representatives and their staff members. Capitol Hill Day 2011 was a monumental success, with a record number of people and states visiting a record number of congressional offices. Over 360 participants visited congressional offices representing 42 different states. Volunteers serving as State Captains organized an unprecedented 270¹ plus congressional meetings. Participants met with an impressive number of the Members of Congress who sit on key committees such as the House and Senate Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (T-HUD) Appropriations Subcommittees and Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Subcommittees.

Participants focused on key priorities such as funding for HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Homeless Services programs, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs.

Only a few weeks after Capitol Hill Day 2011, some tangible results of these meetings have already begun to emerge. For example, during the week of Capitol Hill Day, 29 senators signed on to a letter in support of robust funding for HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants – many joining immediately after connecting with Capitol Hill Day participants.

The full results of the energy and efforts of Capitol Hill Day 2011 participants will be more fully visible in the months ahead. To date, neither chamber of Congress has released its fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations bills, which will attest to the concrete success of Capitol Hill Day meetings. Still, Capitol Hill Day participants realized valuable opportunities to create and strengthen relationships with their Members of Congress and their staff members, and these bonds will have immeasurable impact in the coming weeks, months, and years. Further details on the success and results of Capitol Hill Day 2011 are available in the following pages.

¹ This number represents the total number of meetings held, including a handful of multiple meetings with the same congressional office but attended by different constituents and a few joint meetings or receptions with multiple congressional offices present.

Introduction

Every year, people from across the country participate in the Alliance's Capitol Hill Day and take advantage of being in Washington, DC for the *National Conference on Ending Homelessness* to meet with their U.S. Senators and Representatives and their respective staff members. There is no better group to act as the voice of the movement to eradicate homelessness than these experts, including providers, local leaders, city and state government employees, people who have experienced homelessness, and advocates. They can speak first-hand about the scope of homelessness and the successful interventions being implemented in their communities.

Face time with Members of Congress and their staff is one of the most important ways for these experts to take part in federal advocacy – a critical component in ending homelessness. Capitol Hill Day helps congressional offices to understand homelessness and its solutions directly from constituents. This, in turn, equips them with the knowledge and capacity they need to ensure that communities have the resources and policies required to end homelessness once and for all.

During Capitol Hill Day 2011, held in July in conjunction with the Alliance's *National Conference on Ending Homelessness*, volunteer State Captains from across the country organized more than 360 Capitol Hill Day participants to attend more than 270 meetings with congressional offices representing 42 states. This report includes an overview of Capitol Hill Day 2011, a list of the 2011 Capitol Hill Day policy priorities, a review of some of the key offices with which advocates met, and a summary of the impact that the meetings have already had on federal policy – though their full impact will not be apparent for months to come.

Capitol Hill Day 2011 at a Glance

Highlights

- 62 volunteer State Captains from across the country;
- Over 360 participants;
- 271 congressional meetings, including nearly 50 in which a Member of Congress joined the conversation in person; and
- Congressional offices representing 42 states.

Federal Policy Priorities

- Provide \$2.4 billion in FY 2012 for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants Program.
- Renew all existing Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers in FY 2012, and provide funding for incremental vouchers targeted toward the most vulnerable households, including:
 - \$57 million for Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration vouchers; and
 - \$75 million for new HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program vouchers to serve an estimated 11,538 additional homeless veterans.

- Provide \$135 million in FY 2012 for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Programs, including:
 - \$5 million for the Administration’s requested demonstration on sexual exploitation;
 - \$3 million for the RHYA-mandated incidence and prevalence study on youth homelessness; and
 - An additional \$11 million for the Transitional Living Programs to support housing and service interventions to help runaway and homeless youth stabilize in housing while completing high school.
- Provide \$100 million for SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Homeless Services Programs in FY 2012, including \$12 million for the Administration’s proposed Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration.

Table 1

Meetings Held with Congressional Offices of Members on Key Committees

	Senate T-HUD Subcmte	Senate HHS Subcmte	House T-HUD Subcmte	House HHS Subcmte
	Murray	Harkin	Latham	Rehberg
	Mikulski	Inouye	Wolf	Alexander
	Durbin	Murray	Carter	Kingston
	Harkin	Landrieu	LaTourette	Flake
	Feinstein	Durbin	Diaz-Balart	DeLauro
	Leahy	Reed	Womack	Lowey
	Lautenberg	Kohl	Olver	Jackson
	Kohl	Mikulski	Pastor	Roybal-Allard
	Collins	Brown	Kaptur	Lee
	Shelby	Shelby	Price	
	Hutchison	Cochran		
	Kirk	Hutchison		
	Coats	Kirk		
	Moran	Moran		
	Blunt			
Number of Cmte Members Visited	15	14	10	9
Total Number of Cmte Members	19	18	11	13

Table 2
Number of Meetings in Which Each 2011 Policy Priority Was Discussed

Policy Priority	Number of Meetings	Percent of Meetings
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants (HEARTH Act implementation)	246	91
Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHYA)	90	33
Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers	100	37
HUD-VASH Vouchers	110	41
Housing and Services Demonstration	59	22
SAMHSA Homeless Services	82	30

Of particular note is that Capitol Hill Day advocates educated at least **five times as many** congressional offices on the importance of RHYA resources to their constituents in 2011 as they did in 2010. Furthermore, they briefed about 100 more congressional offices on the importance of HUD's McKinney-Vento programs in 2011 than in 2010. In addition, Capitol Hill Day participants more than doubled the number of offices educated on SAMHSA Homeless Services.

In addition to items on the official Capitol Hill Day Policy Agenda, about 20 other policy issues related to homelessness were discussed with congressional offices. The two additional issues most frequently discussed were capitalizing the National Housing Trust Fund (**at least 22 meetings**), and the Section Eight Savings Act (**at least 8 meetings**).

Participation by Conference Attendees

- At least 360 people from 41 states participated in Capitol Hill Day. This represents **more than 1 in 4 conference attendees**. These are recorded individuals known to have definitely participated in meetings; it is likely that additional people joined at least one congressional meeting.
- Four states had a 100 percent participation rate, with every single conference registrant from that state participating in Capitol Hill Day 2011: Montana (1/1), Nevada (5/5), West Virginia (9/9), and Rhode Island (6/6).
- Other states with high participation rates include Maine (92 percent), Utah (81 percent), Missouri (73 percent), Michigan (58 percent), Alaska (57 percent), Wisconsin (50 percent), and Mississippi (50 percent).

District Visits

Capitol Hill Day participants invited more than 37 offices to visit programs in their district over the coming months.

Progress on 2011 Capitol Hill Day Priorities

HUD Appropriations

Priorities

- Provide \$2.4 billion in FY 2012 for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants Program; and
- Renew all existing Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers in FY 2012, and provide additional funding for incremental vouchers targeted toward the most vulnerable households, including:
 - \$57 million for Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration vouchers; and
 - \$75 million for new HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program vouchers to serve an estimated 11,538 additional homeless veterans.

Capitol Hill Day Action

- Capitol Hill Day participants reached **15 out of the 19 members of the Senate Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (T-HUD) Appropriations Subcommittee**. They also reached **10 out of the 11 House T-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee members**.
- Capitol Hill Day participants discussed the importance of providing \$2.4 billion for McKinney-Vento programs with **more than 246 congressional offices**.
- Capitol Hill Day participants discussed the importance of protecting Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers with **about 100 congressional offices**. They specifically discussed the importance of providing new HUD-VASH vouchers with at least 110 offices and requested funding for the Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration from at least 59 offices.

Accomplishments

Neither the House nor Senate T-HUD Appropriations Subcommittees have released their FY 2012 funding bills as of this writing, so it is not possible to assess the full effect of Capitol Hill Day 2011 on HUD appropriations. However, some notable progress has already been made.

- During the week of Capitol Hill Day, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Charles Schumer (D-NY) circulated a sign-on letter to their colleagues in the Senate in support of robust funding for HUD's McKinney-Vento programs. **A total of 29 senators joined the letter** – one more than joined a similar letter in 2010, despite an even leaner funding environment. The letter included two Republican senators – Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Scott Brown (R-MA).
 - **Advocates from Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Washington were particularly influential in getting so many signatures on the letter.** At least eight senators joined the letter immediately after connecting with Capitol Hill Day participants: Senators Menendez (D-NJ), Blumenthal (D-CT), Cantwell (D-WA), Stabenow (D-MI), Levin (D-MI), Gillibrand (D-NY), Landrieu (D-LA), and Scott Brown (R-MA). In total, Capitol Hill Day participants met with all but two of the offices that joined the letter.

- In addition, several senators' offices said that they could not join the Reed-Snowe-Schumer letter but still strongly supported an increase in funding.
 - Senator Feinstein (D-CA) requested that Senate T-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee leaders provide \$2.372 billion for the program in FY 2012.
 - Senator Casey (D-PA) expressed his support for funding the HUD's McKinney-Vento program to the Senate T-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee.
- Staff members from the office of Senator Coons (D-DE) said that he had sent a letter to the Senate T-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee in support of providing \$75 million for new HUD-VASH vouchers.

HHS Appropriations

Priorities

- Provide \$135 million in FY 2012 for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Programs, including:
 - \$5 million for the Administration's requested demonstration on sexual exploitation;
 - \$3 million for the RHYA-mandated incidence and prevalence study on youth homelessness; and
 - An additional \$11 million for the Transitional Living Programs to support housing and service interventions to help runaway and homeless youth stabilize in housing while completing high school.
- Provide \$100 million in FY 2012 for SAMHSA Homeless Services Programs, including \$12 million for the Administration's proposed housing and services demonstration.

Capitol Hill Day Actions

- Capitol Hill Day participants reached **14 out of the 18 members of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (HHS) Appropriations Subcommittee**. They also reached **9 out of the 13 House HHS Appropriations Subcommittee members**.
- Capitol Hill Day participants discussed the importance of making \$135 million available for RHYA programs in FY 2012 with **at least 90 congressional offices**.
- Capitol Hill Day participants discussed the importance of providing \$100 million for SAMHSA Homeless Services programs with **at least 82 congressional offices**.

Accomplishments

Neither the House nor Senate HHS Appropriations Subcommittees have released their FY 2012 funding bills as of this writing, so it is not possible to know the full effect of Capitol Hill Day 2011 on HHS appropriations. However, some notable progress has already been made.

- Representative Shelley Berkley (D-NV) is planning to introduce in the House the Reconnecting Youth to Prevent Homelessness Act, a companion to S. 961 introduced in the Senate by Senator John Kerry (D-MA) in May 2011.

Conclusion

The full impact of Capitol Hill Day 2011 will unfold over the coming months, and the relationships fostered between local experts and Capitol Hill offices will extend far beyond that. However, it is already clear that the more than 360 people who participated in the event have had a measureable impact on federal policy on the issue of homelessness and have created and strengthened relationships with their Members of Congress.