

**Prepared Remarks of Philip Mangano
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Good Morning.

I came in just as Dr. Ehrlenbusch was explaining what HMIS meant. And I'm so glad to hear him talking about the abolitionists, my spiritual heritage.

Well, I've been down here in Washington for a year and a half. Eighteen months. After 23 years of advocating for homeless people in Massachusetts and sometimes coming down here, people who knew me up there predicted I wouldn't last nine months. In fact, at my going away party – it felt more like a wake to me – the predictions ranged from one month to eight.

I promised that, as Jesse Jackson might say, if in Washington I got paralyzed, hypnotized, or compromised, I'd return home immediately.

My colleagues in Massachusetts are shocked I'm still here. I am, too. Even more shocking is that I haven't changed a word of what I was saying up there down here. But that doesn't mean I'm happy about our response to homelessness. We have a long, long way to go. And it's my job to let it be known.

We've made some progress, I believe. Just this past week, we had another meeting of the full Interagency Council at the White House.

On Wednesday we had four Cabinet Secretaries at the meeting. That's more than have ever attended a Council meeting since the Council was created by the McKinney Act in 1987. Secretary Thompson of Health and Human Services, the Chair; Secretary Principi of the Veterans Administration, the vice-chair and chair-elect; Secretary Chao of Labor, vice-chair elect; and Secretary Martinez of Housing and Urban Development, past chair of the Council. All in attendance - along with deputy secretaries, assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries. I never knew there were so many appointees. They were all there.

And we made a number of announcements. We named the grantees for the modest chronic homelessness initiative which, in an unprecedented collaboration, included funding for housing and services from HUD, HHS, and VA.

And the grantees of the Workforce Investment Initiative between Labor and HUD were announced, advancing that radical notion that housing and employment go together!

And we announced a new commitment from the VA for \$12.5 million committed to homeless veterans. And a new \$6.5 million commitment from HUD for housing.

And of great interest, the Social Security Administration formally announced its \$8 million initiative to expedite outreach and determinations for homeless people accessing Supplemental Security Income. It's about time.

But perhaps more importantly, 20 federal agencies were at the table working together collaboratively, in partnership to make their resources more available and accessible to homeless people.

When we sent out the first invitation last year for our inaugural meeting in July 2002, to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the passage of the McKinney Act and to re-commit the federal government to ending homelessness, we sent it to the 20 agencies.

It said, "Come to a Banquet at the White House." Then in the fine print at the bottom of the invitation, it said, "P.S. By the way, it's a potluck."

Meaning, of course, that we would no longer support the idea that one federal agency could do it all. Instead, every agency needed to be at the table, making the mainstream and targeted resources more available to homeless people. After a 6 year period of dormancy, the agencies are back at the table.

You know how some people say that the **living** skills of homeless people atrophy if they are not in housing. Well, we've discovered that the **giving** skills of federal agencies atrophy if they're not at the table. Now they're learning to be in sync.

So, we're slowly sensitizing all these agencies to the implications of policy decisions on the lives of homeless people. It's slow going, but they're fast learners and that's resulted in new resources. **Modest** as they are.

The work of the Interagency Council in Washington and across the country is to create **partnerships** at every level of government and community. Federal agencies are partnering. And we're partnering with Governors and states to create state interagency councils that make state resources more available and accessible to homeless people. We've sponsored policy academies on chronic homelessness inviting every state to participate this year. Most have. We're pushing on states to make their mainstream and entitlement resources more available for homeless people.

We're pushing. We need all of you to be pulling. Once again, I challenge the National Coalition and other national advocacy organizations to partner with us to

create Advocacy Academies that advocate to make state mainstream resources more available to homeless people.

Not only are we partnering with states and Governors, we're partnering with cities and counties and Mayors and County Executives.

This summer at the U.S. Conference of Mayors and at the National Association of Counties, we partnered to unanimously pass resolutions supporting 10-year planning processes to end homelessness in cities and counties. More recently, the Council has hosted city/county regional focus groups in 3 federal regions through our ten Regional Coordinators. All ten will have focus groups by the end of next month. All with the intent of partnering to end homelessness.

At the U.S. Conference of Mayors, we worked closely with my friend Mayor Tom Menino of Boston and Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago and Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco.

As you know they have pretty big D's after their names. In fact, it's all the way down in their marrow. There's no question that their genetic code is DNA.

And you know this Administration in Washington has a pretty big R after its name. But, at the Conference with these Mayors, we agreed on this issue of homelessness that **partnership trumps partisanship**. On this issue there is no D or R or I or G (or, if you are from California, the other hundred initials). We're all just Americans, working together to end a national disgrace.

And we're partnering with innovators and researchers all over the country who are shaping our agenda to end homelessness for all Americans. As you know we are placing priority on people experiencing chronic homelessness; people who are disabled, long-term, and most at risk of death on our streets. When you look at the numbers of our neighbors out on the sidewalks in street counts being done around the country, the need is obvious, the response, appropriate.

Now I know some people see the word "priority" and read "exclusivity."

Anyone who says we are focusing only on one population of homeless people to the exclusion of others, just hasn't done their homework. They've not looked at the current investment that is being made. They haven't bothered to understand the personal commitment I bring to this issue. And they don't understand how policy is formed. Not on anecdote and hearsay. But on data and research.

And I've done some research of my own with homeless families all over this country.

And you know what, they want the same thing that all homeless people want.

I've gone out and talked to them directly. Their voices are unanimous. They don't ask for a program, a plan, or a pill. They want a place – a place to live. An apartment. A house. City, suburbs, rural area. They want the same thing.

They want the verb and equation of homelessness changed. They're tired of being managed. They want the verb changed - homelessness **ended**.

And they're tired of everything coming first – shelter, transitional programs, artificial “readiness standards”. They want the **equation changed**. Housing, first. First. Not necessarily, only. But first. If other things are needed, so be it in the context of housing. Families are clear. So are individuals. The verb and equation must change.

At our Council meeting last Wednesday, we also announced the resumption of Policy Academies on Family Homelessness this year, and the Council, in response to a letter from the Coalition, clearly indicated that we were beginning to bring together the research and data on the recent rise in family homelessness to focus our attention and new resources.

By the way, have you all seen the letter I sent in response to the Coalition's letter?

So, no, priority does not mean exclusivity. Those who have interpreted our intent that way can now return to the humble partnership already awaiting them at the Council.

Our partnerships are developing a new standard of expectation on this issue of homelessness. We expect visible, measurable, quantifiable change on our streets, in homeless programs and, most importantly, in the lives of homeless people themselves.

We'll no longer accept the dumbing down of homeless people as unable to secure or sustain housing or jobs. That old myth is discredited all across this country.

We can now say that there is a housing strategy or technology for every profile of homeless person, whether on the streets for 10 years or a family just falling in.

Nor should we accept any longer the shuffling of homeless people from one city to another, or from one side of town to the other, or from one homeless program to another. Not if we're customer-centric, which is a modern way of saying we shouldn't do to others what we don't want done to ourselves.

Nor can we accept the dusting off of 19th century vagrancy and loitering laws that create a 30 or 60 or 90 day punitive response, but **no lasting change**. We don't need the old ideas, when the tipping point aims at strategic solutions, not ineffective incarcerations.

Finally, and I believe most importantly, the Council is forging a partnership with homeless people themselves. All over this country, I am meeting with homeless people as part of my visits. With everybody out of the room, the unprompted response of the vast majority of homeless people, is the same - they want a place to live.

Just a few weeks ago, I was in Pittsburgh at Bethlehem Haven. They have a day drop-in, a shelter, and two stages of transition for men and women. I went to each program and asked our homeless neighbors what they wanted. Every one of them said the same thing. "A place to live." "A place of my own."

As one couple about to get married on the steps of the church on whose porch they are sleeping - told me: "All we want is just a room to get started. Just a room and then we'll move on from there."

Well, we have a promise to keep to that couple. And a promise to all of the folk in those programs at Bethlehem Haven and in all the programs and on all the streets of our country. And that promise is that we have not forgotten you and we will not leave you behind.

You are the consumer, our customer. But, most importantly, you are our neighbor. And you've made it clear that you want housing. And that's our mission. To keep the promise of America to you. A Home for every American. To ensure that none of our neighbors are living without housing.

And I think that's our job today. To work together to end homelessness by ensuring that all of our neighbors have a place to live. To leave none behind. No family. No individual. No child.

There's an old hymn I discovered.

The hymn says, "Save us, Lord, from weak resignation to the evil we abhor."

"Save us, Lord, from weak resignation to the evil we abhor." Is there anyone in this room who would disagree that so many of our neighbors not having a place to live is an "evil" - is a wrong that needs remedying?

Most of you know that I'm from Boston. And you know I'm an abolitionist. You're born one there. It's in the gene pool. You see a social wrong, you want to right it. You see a social evil, you want to end it.

We do abhor the fact that so many in our country are without housing. And we reject “weak resignation” as a response.

There are so many voices calling us to that weak resignation that sometimes it’s hard to maintain our higher calling. Our determined resolve.

Voices that tell us what we’re doing is all that can be done.

That shelters, soup kitchens, and street outreach are the best we can offer.

Voices that tell us everything we’ve tried doesn’t work. That homelessness is just an intractable part of the social landscape.

That all of our efforts are in vain. They don’t make a difference. They’re just a drop in the ocean.

That homeless people want to be homeless. They don’t want or need new resources. And that we shouldn’t put new money after bad.

Well, these voices have been around for a long, long time. They told the abolitionists that nothing would change. That the peculiar institution would continue to thrive. That north and south would not let slavery fall.

And they told the suffragists that no amount of dedication or commitment would ever bring the vote to women. And that women didn’t want to vote anyway.

And they told the anti-totalitarians to accept the enslavement of whole countries. That the Wall would remain up and the Curtain would stay down. Besides, they’ve accommodated themselves to that system, we were told. Accept détente.

And they told the anti-apartheidists that nothing could be done in South Africa. That what existed would continue and that a bloody civil war would only result in more autocratic rule. It’s a part of the world landscape, we were told.

Well, those voices were wrong then. And they’re wrong now.

I believe that another great social movement is now being constellated in this country to overcome yet another seemingly intractable social evil – the fact that millions of our neighbors do not have a place to live.

We are on the front lines of that movement, both inside and outside the government. Many of us are working to the same end. We don’t always have the same means. But we should not be so quick to dismiss the path of others.

That can lead to self righteous pride, which only leads to polarization, gridlock, stalemate, and failure.

Our movement right now is a movement of partnership all over this country. And just as in the past, the Harriet Tubmans, the Fredrick Douglasses, and William Lloyd Garrisons and Lincolns, and the Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the Susan B. Anthony, and the Sakharovs and Solzhenitsyns, and Gorbachevs, and Mandelas, and Bothas, and Tutus are now being formed across this country.

And in this room.

Cabinet members, federal officials, Governors, Mayors, County Executives, homeless program staff, and homeless people are constellating a partnership.

And this partnership of ours is not one of “weak resignation.” To the contrary, we have the bold resolve to say that abolition is our end. Ending a national disgrace.

Never in as timely manner as we would like. But I say set your watches. Mark your calendars. This social evil will soon join slavery, disenfranchisement, Soviet totalitarianism, and apartheid as historical evils overcome by an irresistible, inexorable movement that refused to accommodate the evil any longer.

You. **You** are part of that movement, “Save us, Lord, from weak resignation to the evil we abhor.”

Amen. Thank you.