



The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness

March 31, 2004

The Honorable Rick Renzi
U.S. House of Representatives
418 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Renzi:

On behalf of the 210,000 members and 1,200 affiliates of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), I am writing to express strong support for the Samaritan Initiative Act of 2004 (HR 4057). As the nation's largest organization representing individuals with severe mental illnesses and their families, NAMI is pleased to support your efforts to address the important issue of ending chronic homelessness.

Numerous studies have made clear that individuals with severe mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse disorders are disproportionately represented among individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness, i.e. those who get and stay homeless for a year or more. These studies demonstrate that keeping people chronically homeless (whether on the streets, shelters or other transitional programs) is extremely costly to local communities in terms of the costs associated with added use of jails and emergency rooms. Focusing federal policy on chronic homelessness and strategies oriented toward permanent solutions is long overdue.

HR 4057 is a critical step forward in shifting policy and resources toward chronic homelessness and permanent solutions for states and communities. Your legislation will ensure that efforts to address chronic homelessness stretch across all of the federal agencies responsible for addressing the full range of housing and support service needs of individuals that experience chronic homelessness. This interagency approach is critical to achieving successful outcomes and reaching the goal of ending chronic homelessness for as many as 150,000 individuals and families.

NAMI looks forward to working with you to ensure passage of this important legislation. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Fitzpatrick
Acting Executive Director