

## Meet Our New Executive Director

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and to share some insights on the goals for the Council during my tenure as executive director.

As many of you may know by now, I was appointed in October, and my first day on the job was November 16. So in many ways, I'm still getting used to my new surroundings after spending the last 14 years as director of the Community Shelter Board in Columbus, Ohio.

I am hopeful that my understanding of how to make federal programs work to benefit homeless persons at the local level, combined with my many years of engagement at the national level as an advocate, resource person, and analyst will serve me well as I get down to the business of working with other agencies in the Federal government strengthening and forging new partnerships with state and local governments, the private sector and non-profit organizations to end the problem of homelessness in America.

Both President Obama and HUD Secretary Donovan, who is chairman of the Council, have stated that no one should have to be homeless in a country as wealthy as ours, and I couldn't agree more. Ending homelessness is a very high priority, and the need is evident given the current economic and housing crisis.

This is a pivotal moment for those of us on the front lines in the effort to end homelessness. The mandate for me is clear.

In addition to coordinating the federal response to homelessness and creating new partnerships at state and local levels, the Council is required under the HEARTH Act, to make available for public comment and to present to the President and the Congress a national strategic plan to end homelessness by May 20, 2010.

This week I had my first meeting with the Council's Policy Group, which consists of senior-level policy representatives who represent every department that makes up the Council and carries out the Council's agenda. We outlined a conceptual framework for the national plan. We have set an aggressive timeline for accomplishing our mission, and I am excited by the possibilities of what we can get done. I believe that with your support, I will produce an action plan to achieve our shared goal to end homelessness.

As we know by now, families with children are being uniquely affected by the current economic crisis that's being played out around the country. There is a spike in the number of homeless families across the board in urban, suburban and rural areas. The foreclosure crisis means homeowners are losing their homes; renters in foreclosed properties are

losing their apartments, and people losing their jobs are at high risk of becoming homeless.

What this means is that we have our work cut out for us despite the great work done around the country -- through local plans to end homelessness - - that have shown success in reducing chronic homelessness.

During my many years of working on the issue of homelessness, I've come to respect and appreciate the important role that advocacy and advocates play in making sure that the issue gets the attention it deserves from all levels of government.

As the Council begins work on the national plan to end homelessness, I will strive to listen to, and engage the disparate voices of individuals who have been toiling for years outside the government. The plan will be about building coalitions and getting people together.

The goal is to have a solid, tangible Blueprint for action that will offer real and significant solutions to the problem of homelessness for families, children and youth.

I have already heard from many individuals and groups, and the call is for inclusiveness and engagement of all stakeholders, including people who have experienced and are experiencing homelessness; intra-and interagency planning; supportive housing, health care needs, concrete goals and time lines, including evaluation mechanisms, specificity and accountability.

It is my intention that this national plan to end homelessness will inform and support the management plans of federal agencies and departments and beyond. I fully intend to follow in the footsteps of our former acting Executive Director Pete Dougherty by working more actively across program areas.

If there is one thing I've learned about homelessness, it is that it is a very inclusive problem. To prevent and end homelessness, we must bring as many people as possible to the table, including those outside of government who are responsible for many of the innovations that enabled us to shift our focus in the Recovery Act toward prevention and rapid re-housing.

These are challenging times for us in the area of homelessness. The process of drafting a strategic plan not only sets goals for the future, it will help us better understand where we are today. I'm confident that by working together, guided by these goals and our shared values, we'll bring an end to homelessness in our cities, towns and rural communities across our great country.

