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**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO  
CITY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE ON HOUSING,  
NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT, AND THE HOMELESS  
NOVEMBER 9, 2004**

**I. Introduction and thank you**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before City Council's Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development and the Homeless. I applaud Council's efforts to address the economic impact of homelessness in Philadelphia, and its commitment to implementing a plan to end homelessness within ten years.

My name is Gloria Guard, and I am the President of People's Emergency Center (PEC), the state's oldest service agency for homeless families. PEC offers a comprehensive "continuum of care" to address the housing, employment and social service needs of homeless families in Philadelphia. PEC has served over 6,000 homeless women and children and been remarkably successful in helping these families achieve permanent self-sufficiency.

PEC's sister organization, the People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation (PECCDC), has been a leader in the elimination and renovation of abandoned properties and vacant buildings in West Powelton, where we are located. PECCDC has leveraged \$21 million worth of investment and converted 78 vacant and blighted properties into 100 units of affordable transitional and permanent housing. PECCDC also has created four social service facilities, a community playground, and green space in the neighborhood.

**II. Framework**

The rise in family homelessness

Every day, more and more families become homeless in America. In fact, family homelessness has increased 800% since 1980. This year, one child out of fifty in this country will not have a home. Families with children represent the fastest growing segment of the homeless population and now total more than 40% of all homeless people.



A United Way Agency

State law requires us to tell you that PEC is registered as a charitable organization with the Commonwealth. You can obtain a copy of our registration and financial information by calling toll free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

### Weak/strong housing market

In any discussion of family homelessness in Philadelphia, an understanding of the local housing market is key. Philadelphia is a weak housing market city. That means that, as compared to other cities, housing is relatively affordable here. Rents are half as much here as in some other large cities. What this means is that in cities where rents are much higher, housing affordability often is the one and only reason that many families are homeless. (Housing wage in Philadelphia is approximately \$17/hour. This may seem high, but in San Francisco, the housing wage is \$34, and in San Jose it is \$35. See graphic in Appendix A.)

### What housing markets mean in terms of what homeless families look like

I certainly do not mean to imply that housing affordability is not an issue in Philadelphia, because, of course, it is: we all know that affordable housing is in short supply here. But for many of Philadelphia's homeless families, housing is only one of many overwhelming challenges that poor families face. Often, a complex array of social and personal problems creates an environment where homelessness is almost inevitable for our most at-risk vulnerable families. The point here is that in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, affordable housing often is the ONLY missing ingredient – the cause of and the solution for homelessness. This is NOT the case in Philadelphia. Here, affordable housing is essential, but it represents only one of three components necessary to resolving homelessness and assuring permanence, stability and independence. The other two components are income/employment and support services.



### Other challenges facing Philadelphia's homeless families

Homeless families in Philadelphia tend to be poor, minority, and headed by young women who have not graduated from high school. Many of these women are fleeing not only domestic violence, but violence in their communities. They often have struggled with substance abuse, mental illness and chronic health problems. Their children also have high rates of illness, as well as high rates of developmental delays and academic problems. These children and their parents generally do not have strong families to rely on for social support, and the challenges they face create barriers to accessing whatever social services might exist in their neighborhoods.

Furthermore, social and other service providers in the community at large often are ill-equipped to address the multiple and complex challenges these parents face. For example, homeless mothers typically are unable to meet the eligibility criteria of mainstream training programs and find it difficult to gain employment in an environment that requires higher entry-level skills than in the past. Consequently, programs that target homeless parents tend to be much more successful. (More data about families, both nationally and locally, can be found in sources shown in Appendix B.)

In addition to facing overwhelming personal challenges, these families are living in a difficult time, politically and economically speaking. The lack of employment opportunities, the uncertainty of welfare, struggling schools, inadequate health care, insufficient job training programs: unfortunately, we expect these problems to get much worse in the coming years. Given the recent election, we fear that, unless the City steps up to the plate, the continued existence of programs that truly serve homeless families is at risk.

#### What these challenges mean in terms of ending homelessness

While the 10-year plan to end homelessness includes numerous valuable proposals to mitigate the problem of homelessness in Philadelphia, the intractable nature of existing social problems means that it would be naïve for us to believe that family homelessness will be a thing of the past in our lifetime. However, greatly reducing family homelessness is an achievable goal. And, improving the quality of life for the hundreds of families who spend 6-12-18 months in shelter is an essential step in achieving this goal. It is also our responsibility. We simply must provide the highest quality of services to those who do become homeless, particularly to the children. These vulnerable families deserve the best we can offer.

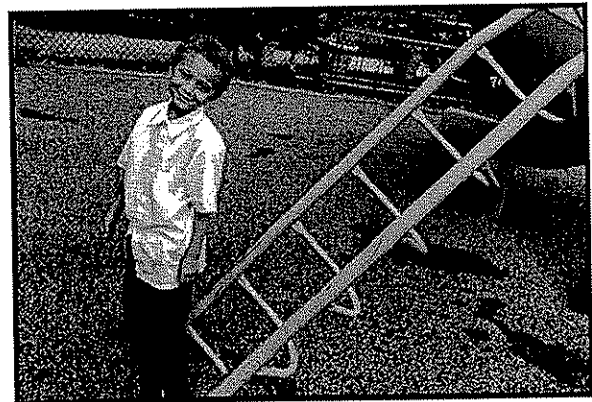
### **III. Homeless children are more likely to become homeless adults than are other children.**

Experiencing homelessness as a child is a predictor of homelessness as an adult. Other traumatic experiences in childhood, such as child abuse, foster care, chronic illness and mental health problems, also constitute risk factors for future homelessness.

By focusing on the needs of homeless children, and by sheltering them in a services-rich environment, we can not only improve their well-being today, but we can also break the cycle of homelessness, and greatly reduce the numbers of homeless families tomorrow.

### **IV. Recommendations for improved services for CHILDREN in shelter**

Somewhere on the order of 1,000 children will sleep in a homeless shelter in Philadelphia tonight. Although homelessness is an incredibly traumatic experience, entering a shelter can be a first step towards stability. To this end, many local shelters have implemented a variety of programs to support families and to enrich the lives of homeless children. These programs take the form of novel and successful approaches to addressing the needs of these extremely vulnerable children and their families. The problem, however, is inconsistency: one shelter might have a terrific after-school program but inadequate staff training, while another shelter might have on-site health screening but no support groups for children.



## Specific recommendations for serving children in shelter

Here are our recommendations for improving family shelters in Philadelphia:<sup>1</sup>

### **Physical Environment**

- ◆ Upgrade the physical plant of every family shelter to be infant and child-friendly and assure it is maintained appropriately;
- ◆ Provide designated spaces for academic and recreational activities for children in shelter, including expanding the *Bright Spaces* project to every family shelter;

### **Adolescents**

- ◆ Develop special programs for teens and young adults in a few shelters, and refer families with older children to those shelters;

### **Health**

- ◆ Create on-site health clinics at all shelters where children can receive routine care and parents can receive health information;
- ◆ Assist shelter administrators in the creation of “child-friendly” nutritious meals in all shelters;
- ◆ Develop a formal connection between the City’s behavioral health care system and all family shelters;



### **Education**

- ◆ Strengthen connections between the education system and family shelters so that all children attend school regardless of their living arrangements;
- ◆ Grow the relationship between shelters and the Head Start and Early Head Start programs;
- ◆ Connect children who are living in shelters to the City’s expansive after-school and Beacon School programs;

### **Staffing**

- ◆ Enhance the training of shelter staff to assure some level of proficiency on topics such as child development, SIDS prevention, parenting support, and identifying special needs;
- ◆ Expand the use of AmeriCorps and other community volunteer programs to staff *Bright Spaces*, and on-site after-school and homework-help activities at the larger family shelters;

### **Research and Advocacy**

<sup>1</sup> These recommendations are taken from a report on Homeless Children in Philadelphia. A copy of the full report can be obtained by contacting Gloria Guard; it is expected to be published and available after November 30, 2004.

- ◆ Add children who are living in homeless shelters to the index of youngsters profiled in the Philadelphia Safe and Sound Report Card, so that an annual well-being scale is available to policy-makers and service providers.

### Cost to the City

Much of what we propose is cost-neutral. We know that collaboration with the nonprofit sector and partnerships with businesses can be extremely effective. For example, the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Pennsylvania operates troops in nearly all of our family shelters, at no cost to the city. Many other wonderful programs, such as Effective Black Parenting, are available at no or low cost and should be implemented in all shelters. We need to expand these efforts and replicate existing successful programs in family shelters citywide. Recruiting additional partners would maximize the efficiency of these joint ventures without over-burdening existing partners.

### **V. Recommendations for assuring economic independence of the PARENTS**



To care for their children, homeless parents need to achieve independence and greater economic self-sufficiency. Thus must successfully move from welfare to work, and they need a program responsive to their specific situation to do so. In 1993, PEC launched its Job Opportunities and Business Skills Program (JOBS) for homeless parents living in shelter or transitional housing. JOBS is the only Department of Public Welfare County Assistance Office-approved welfare-to-work program in Philadelphia

tailored to homeless parents.

Each participant works with a Specialized Employment Advisor (SEAs) to develop an individualized plan outlining employment goals and actions needed to achieve them, including child care, health care, counseling and/or housing as needed. SEAs meet with participants at least weekly to monitor progress toward goals. Work Readiness sessions focus on workplace culture, decision-making, attitude, conflict resolution, and stress management. Daily General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation classes are conducted on-site. JOBS offers workshops on effective parenting, an increasingly critical component as mothers struggle to balance work and family life. In collaboration with several well-regarded providers, JOBS offers training and relevant certification for entry-level positions in food services, nurse's aide/CNA, child care assistant, and office and clerical support.

Participants at the point of seeking employment join Job Club, facilitated by PEC's Job Developer. They share employment leads, develop resumes and cover letters, practice interview skills, and learn to network on the job to position themselves for internal advancements.

Once participants are employed, retention case management is provided formally for one year, with the provision that participants can return for services should they need them. Retention services include regular contact with the SEA. Our focus is on ensuring that participants gain access to all possible “work supports” for which they are eligible, including child care and transportation subsidies as well as transitional medical and food stamp benefits.

**In the past four years, nearly 500 homeless parents from 13 shelters in Philadelphia have participated in the JOBS program. More than 285 of them have been successfully placed in employment with an overall average starting wage of \$7.24. See Appendix C for the four year report.**

We recommend that the City ensure that programs like this survive and thrive regardless of funding cuts we are sure to see at the federal level in the coming years.

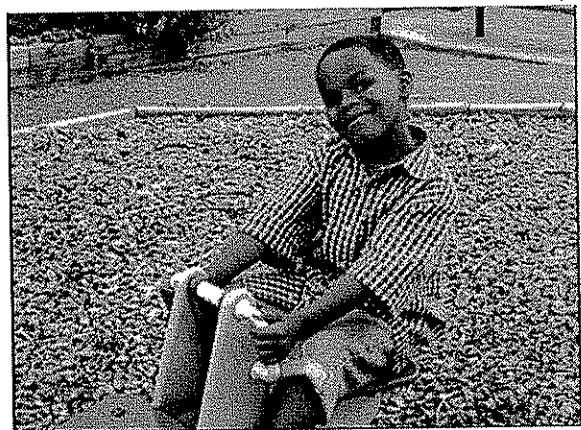
## **VI. Conclusion**

### We commend Council and City

We commend Council for holding these hearings, and we commend the City for undertaking the 10-year plan. Just this past spring the Blueprint to End Homelessness urged this Committee to create and endorse such a plan, and we are pleased with the inclusive nature of this process.

### We encourage continued oversight by Council of shelter system

Finally, we believe that City Council should review the funding and operations of the city’s homeless system. This oversight would extend to city, state and federal funds, and could mirror the OHCD planning process, whereby every year, a preliminary plan is submitted for comment late in the year, and a final plan, incorporating public input, is submitted the following spring as part of the City’s budget. This process would allow for reporting of past trends and future projections in such areas as demographics and recidivism. For the City, this would be a great opportunity to publicize the progress that has been made towards ending homelessness.



We hope that there will be more opportunities for Council to be involved with new programs and with any redesign of the system, and that there will be give and take when key decisions are made.

Today you will have the benefit of many experts telling you what has been done and what needs to be done. I hope you will invite us back in 6 months to see whether we have made progress, to measure our performance, and to see how Philadelphia is measuring up compared to sister cities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this issue. With Council's leadership, we can create an optimum environment for children and their families living in emergency shelter, and environment in which we would like our own children to stay, were we to need shelter.

For further information:

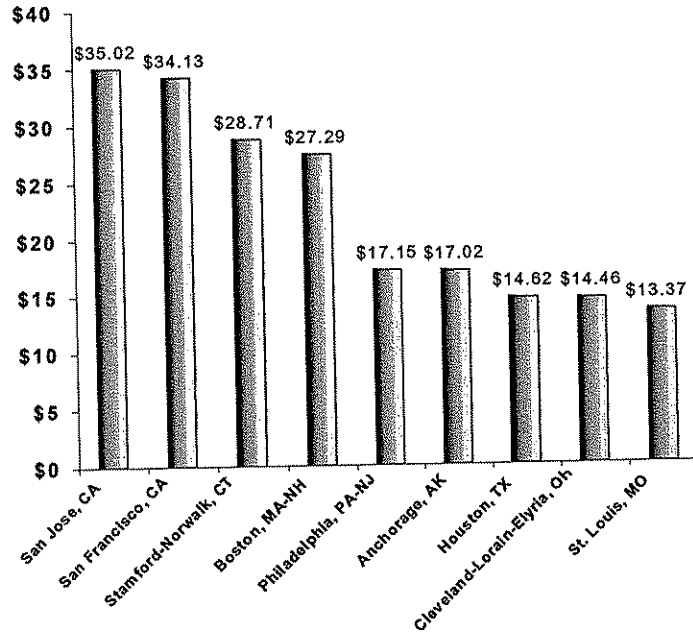
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## APPENDIX A

### Housing Market Graphic

#### Comparing Weak and Strong Housing Markets

Housing Wage/Hr for 2 Bedroom Fair Market Rent



Source: National Low-Income Housing Coalition (2003). *Out of Reach: America's Housing Wage Climbs*. National Low-Income Housing Coalition



## APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Four Year Cumulative  
JOBS Program Report

**March 1, 2000 – April 31, 2004**

**Enrollment and Placement Breakdown**

City Contracted Shelters

<u>Shelter</u>	<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Individuals Placed</u>	<u>Number of Placements</u>
Acts - Master Street	22	12	19
Christian Tabernacle	53	34	45
Darlene Morris	18	12	26
Francis House	19	11	14
Kirkbride	8	4	7
RHD/Woodstock	124	68	116
Stenton	10	5	5
Trevor's Place	32	19	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>263</b>

Private Provider Shelters

<u>Shelter</u>	<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Individuals Placed</u>	<u>Number of Placements</u>
HELP	7	7	14
Luther House	21	12	16
PEC	104	70	100
Salvation Army	21	5	9
Sojourner House	2	2	4
St. Barnabas	50	27	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>182</b>

**Total All Shelters**

<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Individuals Placed</u>	<u>Total Placements</u>
<b>491</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>445</b>