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SENATE MEMORIAL 2

48TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2008

INTRODUCED BY

Gerald P. Ortiz y Pino

FOR THE WELFARE REFORM OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE CREATION OF A STATEWIDE HOUSING FIRST TASK FORCE
TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF HOMELESSNESS.

WHEREAS, forty-two percent of New Mexico renters pay more
than thirty percent of their income toward rent; and

WHEREAS, twenty-one percent of New Mexico renters pay
more than one-half of their income toward rent, leaving them
vulnerable to homelessness if a crisis occurs; and

WHEREAS, a housing first approach to avoiding and
addressing homelessness has been found effective in reducing
homelessness; and

WHEREAS, a housing first approach gives immediate focus
to finding permanent housing for homeless persons and then
focuses on providing services that keep families from returning
to the streets; and

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1 WHEREAS, a housing first approach recognizes that
2 permanent, affordable housing is fundamental in resolving the
3 homelessness crisis and that some persons need supportive
4 services to stay in housing; and

5 WHEREAS, the majority of individuals and families who
6 participate in housing first programs maintain sobriety, attend
7 work or school, successfully manage their budgets, permanently
8 end relationships with abusers and keep their housing long-
9 term; and

10 WHEREAS, social services are more effective when people
11 are living in their own housing, and investments in supportive
12 services for vulnerable families and individuals are,
13 therefore, more sustainable; and

14 WHEREAS, a housing first approach is more cost-effective
15 than letting people remain homeless, because people who have
16 housing are less likely to use emergency rooms; psychiatric
17 facilities; emergency shelters; and prisons, jails and other
18 criminal justice agencies; and

19 WHEREAS, effective discharge planning from institutions,
20 including psychiatric hospitals, hospitals, foster care and
21 correctional facilities, depends on an adequate supply of
22 appropriate housing options in New Mexico communities; and

23 WHEREAS, a housing first approach can lead to a cost
24 savings of thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) per person in some
25 communities; and

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1 WHEREAS, an increase in investment in housing is
2 associated with a decrease in incarceration rates; and

3 WHEREAS, a significant percentage of people experiencing
4 homelessness have been incarcerated; and

5 WHEREAS, many hard-working families cannot afford to pay
6 for housing and basic necessities, putting them at risk of
7 homelessness due to rapidly rising land prices, slow wage
8 growth, declining real wages and increasing construction costs;
9 and

10 WHEREAS, safe, decent and affordably priced housing
11 provides a foundation for personal success in school and work
12 and is, therefore, a prerequisite for the economic success of
13 New Mexico; and

14 WHEREAS, adopting a housing first approach in New Mexico
15 requires a shift in resources from an emergency system that
16 merely manages the problem of homelessness to a system that
17 helps vulnerable people gain access to and maintain housing;
18 and

19 WHEREAS, the behavioral health purchasing collaborative
20 will soon complete a supportive housing plan that will
21 incorporate a housing first approach and that can serve as a
22 basis for a broader housing first plan; and

23 WHEREAS, coordinating existing resources and plans can
24 help to shift the state's focus to a housing first approach;

25 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE

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1 OF NEW MEXICO that a housing first task force be created and
2 charged with the development of a comprehensive housing first
3 plan for the state of New Mexico; and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a housing first task force be
5 chaired and convened by the secretary of children, youth and
6 families and that it address ways state agencies may better
7 target and coordinate existing resources and strategies and
8 collaborate on strategic plans to support a housing first
9 approach for all people in New Mexico who need housing; and

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the housing first plan include
11 persons with disabilities and with addictions; persons
12 discharged from prison or other institutions; and youth and
13 low-income working families in its housing first focus; and

14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the housing first task force
15 identify specific goals and an implementation time line,
16 identify responsible agencies and agents for each
17 implementation goal and propose relevant action steps and
18 performance measurements to evaluate progress for each goal;
19 and

20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the housing first task force
21 be composed of representatives from the governor's and
22 lieutenant governor's offices, the children, youth and families
23 department, the human services department, the public education
24 department, the aging and long-term services department, the
25 corrections department, the New Mexico mortgage finance

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1 authority, the behavioral health purchasing collaborative,
2 ValueOptions as the single entity for behavioral health
3 services, the New Mexico coalition to end homelessness, the
4 supportive housing coalition of New Mexico, the drug policy
5 alliance, the women's justice project and three service
6 providers; and

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the housing first task force
8 present a comprehensive plan for implementing a housing first
9 approach to homelessness to the interim welfare reform
10 oversight committee by November 1, 2008; and

11 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
12 transmitted to the secretary of children, youth and families
13 and to the secretary or director of each of the organizations
14 named to participate in the task force.

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