
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY SENIOR ISSUES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

*“Testimony discussing the Rental Assistance
to Needy Families Program”*

LOCATION: Committee Room 9
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: May 3, 2001
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Melvin Cottrell, Chairman
Assemblyman Kenneth C. LeFevre, Vice-Chairman
Assemblywoman Charlotte Vandervalk
Assemblywoman Arline M. Friscia



ALSO PRESENT:

Rafaela Garcia
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide*

Leigh A. Maris
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aide*

Dana Burley
*Assembly Democratic
Committee Aide*

*Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
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(The Assembly Senior Issues and Community Services Committee held a meeting on May 3, 2001 at 10:00 a.m. in Committee Room 9 of the State House Annex. The recorded portion of that meeting follows.)

ASSEMBLYMAN MELVIN COTTRELL (Chairman): Now, we're having a meeting here today, and a lot of people are here. This meeting -- the issue of rental assistance for the needy has been brought to my attention by Legal Services of the State of New Jersey. Today, we will hear from the people affected by the program.

I'd like to come directly to the point. There's a lot of people here that would like to testify. Maybe you can state your statements, and since there are a lot of names, we'll have you read them off.

MS. GARCIA (Committee Aide): Sure, Assemblyman.

Okay. Peter Wise, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: First state your name and everything, and what happened. Of course, this is being-- We have a recorder here that is going to record this. It's a legal hearing, and I hope to hear some information here today that will come up in the bill to help you.

P E T E R W I S E: Thank you. I'm pressing the button. There we go. (referring to PA microphone)

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My name is Peter Wise, W-I-S-E. I'm the Director of the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, T-A-S-K, TASK. Thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly on the needs that I see presented to us as a society. The Soup Kitchen operates, as the name implies, a hot lunch and an evening meal program five days a week.

And at this point in time, Mr. Chairman, we are serving over 2500 meals per week. That's 10,000 meals per month. Last year we expanded our program to add evening meals. We have an expanding and growing problem, where we have to serve a growing line of people who come to the Soup Kitchen for their main, if not only, nutrition. The folks who come to the Soup Kitchen these days are roughly in two categories.

The first category is the working poor. As you know, the Federal minimum wage is \$5.15 an hour. States can be above that minimum wage if in their large sense of largesse or progressiveness they see fit to. But the State of New Jersey has chosen to be at the Federal minimum, even though I believe the reality is that we are the first or the second most expensive state in the union in which to live, perhaps competing with the state of Connecticut. In terms of housing and shelter costs, I believe we are the most expensive state in which to live in the continental United States, only exceeded by the state of Hawaii. So it is, indeed, more expensive to live in Waikiki Beach than it is in Trenton.

The average rental cost down in the city here, for say a two-bedroom apartment, say we're talking about a single mother with a couple of children, a two-bedroom apartment is \$800 to \$850 a month. If you do the debt-to-income analysis that we all have to do when we're trying to determine how much shelter cost can we afford, if you need to pay \$850 a month, if you go through that arithmetic, you wind up you need about \$35,000 a year annual income. So \$35,000 a year, if you figure roughly 2000 hours per year if the job is full-time, and many of the people I serve don't have full-time jobs, but if it were a full-time job, say at 50 weeks a year times 40 hours a week, that's 2000 hours. Two thousand hours into \$35,000 a year gives you like \$17.50 an hour.

So we're talking 5.15 minimum wage, which is where we are, the Federal minimum, versus 17.50.

So, even if you're not earning minimum wage, even if by dint of hard labor you've worked your way up doing jobs probably that I personally wouldn't be able to last at more than two hours because of their difficulty and their demands, even if you've worked your way up to six, seven, eight, ten dollars an hour, there's still a large gap between what you're earning as a full-time person and what it takes to live in minimal conditions in this city and around the state. So a big portion of the people who come to the Soup Kitchen these days, who comprise the 2500 who come each week, only a half a mile from here, are the working poor, those who are working at 5.15 or perhaps slightly above that.

The second large category of people who come to the Soup Kitchen are those who have multiple barriers to employment. We're now three years into Work First New Jersey, and those who have been able to benefit from the training program and job readiness program offered by the State are employed. Those we aren't at this point have barriers that face them that are much more profound than what a training program to get you job-ready can be. These folks have profound barriers to employment, and I see it every day at the Soup Kitchen. They will need substantial help. I know the purpose of this hearing is on housing, but I'll just say very briefly that many of the social services are needed in our society. The crowds are getting longer at the Soup Kitchen.

Many of these people are homeless. I'm only two blocks away from the Rescue Mission of Trenton, which is the emergency overnight shelter for people who have no place to go. I don't know if there are members here

from the Rescue Mission in attendance and if they would be permitted to come up and talk if they like, but I have read from their literature that they have been operating at capacity since the fall in the overnight shelter. That's in the order of 160 beds every night filled with people who have no place to go.

The last thing I'll say, Mr. Chairman, is that it seems to me that we have three things going on here in the local region, and I think it's probably representative of many places within the state. We have many people who need decent jobs, living wages. We have many people who need a place to live, housing, affordable housing. And certainly here in the city of Trenton and in many other cities, we have wonderful and beautiful housing stock that is decaying due to lack of use and lack of repair. And it seems to me that those three elements could be the three legs of a stable platform. And what I mean by that is maybe, perhaps, the establishment--

The vision would be the establishment of a building trades community academy, community-based in many cities, where we train people in the building trades in masonry and carpentry, electrician, plumbing, etc. Employ people. Make it financially attractive. Do a good public relations job of soliciting people who have not had good experience in the workforce, train them, have them become skilled in these trades, go and revamp this wonderful, beautiful housing stock that we have in our towns -- it was built 100 years ago, many of them -- and then we can afford to have rental assistance, State level Section 8 vouchers so we don't have this disgrace of waiting lists that extend into years, and we can populate this wonderful housing with people who are in great need.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Okay, thank you. Next speaker.
I want to get all the speakers I can get in. Next speaker.

MS. GARCIA: Carlos E. Hutton from the Rescue Mission Shelter.

C A R L O S E. H U T T O N: Good morning, everyone. How are you doing, Mr. Chairman?

I am from the Rescue Mission that Mr. Wise was talking about. I've been there essentially for about three or four months. I've applied for housing -- well, I guess, close to five years now I have put in an application for housing to better myself and everything, but I never heard from housing. I have been down there and all that, and they have this waiting list. How long does it take? I'm figuring it out in my mind, how long does it take a person who has this -- as the government offers, you know, (indiscernible) housing, how long does it take for an application to be clear to either say you have it or you don't? It's been close to five years now and still waiting. And I'd just like to bring that to your attention.

Thank you very much.

MS. GARCIA: Lowell Arye for the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities.

L O W E L L A R Y E: Thank you. My name is Lowell Arye. I'm the Executive Director of the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities. We have 13 member agencies across the state who serve more than 7000 individuals with multiple, physical, and developmental disabilities.

Right now we are in a crisis for affordable housing for people with disabilities. New Jersey has one of the highest-priced rental housing markets in

the United States. Only Hawaii and the District of Columbia have a higher rental price.

People with disabilities want and need affordable and accessible homes of their own in the community. Even if an individual can find housing that is livable for the general population, accessible housing is an additional impediment. We need more barrier-free housing that is affordable for individuals with disabilities.

Many people with disabilities do not have enough income to be able to rent or buy decent housing without some type of financial assistance. There are other barriers like the stigma of the disability, as well as housing discrimination, which exacerbates this problem. In 1998, according to a study by the National Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities, New Jersey had the lowest value of SSI income expressed as a percentage of one-person household median income. That means that New Jersey's SSI income is equal to only about 14 percent of the state's median income.

Within the housing industry, the issue of affordability and the need for housing assistance is measured primarily by the percentage of income that the household must pay each month for housing costs. The higher the percentage of household income paid for housing, the less affordable that that housing becomes. Once housing costs go about 50 percent of a household's monthly income, the Federal government must consider the household to have "a severe rent burden."

According to that national study that I was speaking about, an individual in New Jersey who receives SSI needs to pay more than their SSI monthly benefit check to rent an efficiency apartment. The same is true for

renting a one-bedroom apartment. For an efficiency, the percent of SSI monthly income to rent in New Jersey is 105.4 percent. That's over their SSI benefit level. For a one-bedroom apartment, the percent of SSI monthly income to rent in New Jersey is 127.3 percent.

At the back (referring to statement), you'll see a chart showing New Jersey's eight federally defined housing markets. It shows that the cost of an efficiency and a one-bedroom apartment are a higher percentage than the average SSI monthly benefit in each of the areas. And you'll see, you can look at Monmouth-Ocean County, for example, whereby-- Now, these are 1998 numbers. Monmouth and Ocean counties, the average SSI payment across the state is \$525 a month. That means that, in effect, to rent an efficiency apartment in Monmouth and Ocean County it would cost 110 percent of their monthly income.

This is really appalling. And people with disabilities-- We have a waiting list for people with developmental disabilities of over 6000 people. Some of them can live independently, not all of them, certainly, but there are some. In the mentally ill community, as well, the same is true. So what can we do about it? Basically, we need to take a look at-- We currently have New Jersey Community Housing Demonstration programs that specifically target people with developmental disabilities and the mental health consumers. But those programs need a lot more funds, and they also-- Other programs and more creative programs need to be developed.

Publicly subsidized rental assistance gives an opportunity to individuals with disabilities who live on fixed incomes to afford decent housing. We need to expand the State Rental Assistance program to cover the population

that is covered under Federal Section 8 housing program. The goal must be to eliminate the community if there is waiting lists for rental assistance vouchers. In addition, we have to make sure on the issue of accessible housing-- We have to make sure, and you as the Legislature must make sure, that local housing authorities apply with HUD regulations requiring them to ensure that public housing and Section 8 housing programs are accessible to people with disabilities.

I appreciate the opportunity to give you this testimony and look forward to working with you in the future on this.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Okay, thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Colin Lewis from the Puerto Rican Congress.

COLIN LEWIS: Hello, sir. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for this opportunity. Literally, someone forced me to fill out my name there. I'm generally not hesitant to talk, but they were encouraging me to just share a little story with you.

Forgive me, sir, and everyone, I'm a little hoarse. We were up praying all night for a very special day today in our country, which is, of course, the National Day of Prayer, where people all over the country look to God to ask him to continue to bless this nation. We are a blessed country. We're outstanding at looking at turning around and picking up those who are hurting and going through tough times in their lives. And I think that is a great thing to continue.

At the Puerto Rican Congress, I'm the Project Coordinator. One of the projects that we're working on is, we're studying the concept of a homeless shelter in our community. We don't have one in the entire county of

Ocean. We see, of course, so many of the devastating stories of people who are sleeping in the woods and people who are sleeping in abandoned cars and people who are staying at the lake, not for a very long period of time, because of different domestic disputes or different problems in their lives or not having enough finances to get a place of their own. A lot of times this is temporary. So we're looking at possibly substantiating a way to try to find a place that we can help these individuals out.

We had one fellow who was an outstanding construction worker, and he just did not have the ability to-- Our rental assistance waiting list is so long in our township, he did not have ability to find a place. He was sleeping in an abandoned house along the stairway and just asked a few of us for assistance, and we would have to try to sneak him-- Well, we eventually were lucky enough to find a place where we could sneak him in to take a shower every day. He wanted to go to work. He wanted to lift himself, and he just needed people around to encourage him. So I don't want to mention the places, but we found a couple places where we could sneak him in and have him shower every day so he could go to work.

Most of the time at our agency we're just finding-- And regarding the homeless situation, we're finding people who are just coupling up and living with each other. There are so many family members who are taking other family people in because there's just not enough rental assistance. So that's one of the major things that we see happening. And that's almost a tough group to document, because luckily they found friends and neighbors and people who care enough to take them in for a while. We see multiple families living together

who would love to have a place of their own and love to be able to share that American dream with their family and their children.

They come to the agency --we have an employment outreach center -- and they come to the agency seeking employment, taking two and three jobs. We have ESL classes as well as we now have a computer class for Spanish-speaking residents. And in the midst of the storms and when we're ready to close the doors and go home, all of the people are showing up. Why? Because they know that these are important skills to better their lives, to be able to provide more for their family. They're seeking a dream that we all seek, and all they need is this extra opportunity for the assistance, whereby now they can be able to provide just the basic survival needs for their family. By getting the rental assistance, that's what they're able to do.

So this is extremely important, and I'm glad they encouraged me to come and say a few words. Thank you for the time.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you. The next witness.

MS. GARCIA: Connie Pascale, Legal Services of New Jersey.

C O N N I E M. P A S C A L E, E S Q .: Thank you very much, Assemblyman Cottrell, Chairman Cottrell, and members of the Committee. I would like to start by thanking you for having this hearing. I think your interest in this is really appreciated, and we appreciate the opportunity. I know a lot of people here are appreciative of the chance to tell their stories to you. So I'd like to thank you very much for that, and I'd especially like to thank Leigh Maris for her interest in this as well.

Having said that, I won't talk long because so many people came a distance to talk about their lives, and I know you're going to be very interested

in their stories. I'd just like to tell you about the materials that I have supplied to the Committee. Page 1 of these materials amount to our recommendations about what we think should be done, and the rest of the materials are a series of studies and papers that dramatize what we think is the problem in New Jersey with regard to housing and particularly housing affordability, and dramatize the great need for rental assistance. And I'll just briefly go over them.

The real problem is, here we have a tremendous gap, as Peter Wise said, between what people earn and housing costs. We did a study at Legal Services of New Jersey. It was done by a nationally known researcher, Diana Pearce. That study, an excerpt from it, appears starting on Page 39. The Ford Foundation has been so taken with that methodology that it intends to spend enough money to have 35 states use that cost-of-living methodology in the next year. If you get their publication, you'll see that it's the cover story in their most recent magazine. And many of the states in our area, including the state of Connecticut, which the government itself paid for, a study like this, using this methodology, have studies, and we're one of the ones in the Northeast.

What that study shows quite clearly is that if you don't make between \$15 and \$20 an hour in New Jersey, you are struggling to pay to survive in our society. That the real cost of living here isn't the Federal poverty level. It's two times the Federal poverty level. And, in fact, the State itself is using that benchmark figure for programs like FamilyCare and other assistance programs that it has. So we have a high cost of living.

The rental costs, as you've heard and will hear from other speakers -- New Jersey has the highest rental cost in the United States. On Page 4 is an excerpt from a report that details that. And what you need to pay the rent here

is an income of about \$14 if you worked 35 hours a week, to \$17 if you worked 40 hours a week. So that is in line with our cost-of-living study. And the problem is that the job situation doesn't have -- provide jobs like that. There aren't that many of them.

On Page 26, I've included a series of excerpts from the Department of Labor's projections. And for the next 10 years, they project jobs that are -- 40 percent of the jobs will be low-wage jobs, as they call them, making less than \$25,000 a year. That's four out of ten jobs in our society are going to pay less than \$25,000 a year. Guess where the biggest employment opportunities are for the next 10 years? Cashiers, salespeople -- they make less than \$25,000 a year, and you're going to hear from some of them here.

So it takes \$15 an hour to live here, and the wages that are paid for those jobs are about \$7 to \$9 an hour, and that's why we have a housing crisis. Because if you can't pay the rent, you even have a problem keeping your job. As we just heard, people are sleeping in houses, because it's very difficult to work and be homeless.

There is in this set of materials, on Page 26, a study that has found -- and there's a growing body of evidence that's found that housing subsidies are a critical element to people making the transition from welfare to work or retaining and keeping a job. Housing is a critical element for people who are trying to work in a low-wage economy. More and more studies are showing that. And rental assistance is the key to that for most of the people here.

And that Diana Pearce study I mentioned, on Page 48 of these materials, she modeled the benefits of getting subsidies to people who are working at low-wage jobs. And she found, if you look on Page 48, you'll see

that in Monmouth County, for instance, a single mother with two children could work for \$8.57 an hour if she got housing assistance, child care assistance, Medicaid, and food stamps. With that help, you could then pay the costs associated with finding a place to live and work at \$8 an hour.

I'm just going to conclude by mentioning the two elements of rental assistance that I think we need to hear about and understand today. One is the emergency sort of rental assistance; that is, if a working family or assisted family is facing homelessness and goes to an agency for help. There are only really three groups of people that can get emergency rental assistance or emergency help: People on Work First New Jersey, that's TANF and general assistance, and SSI recipients. They're eligible for what we call emergency assistance. They can get a year and possibly a few months more in a motel or a year's worth of rental assistance. But if you're working or on social security disability beyond the SSI limit, you're not eligible for those benefits. You can't get emergency help. What happens in that circumstance is that you might go to DYFS, which could suggest foster care for your children as an alternative or some other method. You might have your kids placed with family members, and we'll hear from some people who've done that.

But there is no emergency help for people in that category. None. That's an abomination. The fact that they would pay for foster care at so many hundreds of dollars a month, but not pay the family the money that needs to stay together, is a senseless expenditure. That's the short-term sort of emergency assistance, and you'll hear from people who have struggled with that.

The long-term assistance is the other problem. New Jersey has about 60,000 Section 8 -- Federal Section 8 certificates administered by 81

housing authorities -- 80 to 81 housing authorities. The State's own calculations, as well as the Federal calculations, say that only three out of ten people that are eligible for that assistance can get it. That means that seven out of ten people who need help can't get it. Seven out of ten people who are struggling to find a place to live or to keep a place at a low-wage job or a lower wage job can't get the assistance they need to survive. We need to fill that gap -- that seven out of ten people who need assistance.

The Department of Community Affairs -- just it, as one of the 80 housing authorities, has a waiting list of between 10,000 and 15,000 families. That's basically been closed for a number of years, because it doesn't pay to add people to a list that would require them to wait five or ten years for assistance.

How can we tolerate that type of a gap? We need to do something with that. So what we suggest on Page 1 of this set of materials are some recommendations. The State needs to spend more money on rental assistance. Providing housing for people isn't rocket science. We don't need to commission MIT to come up with a way to deal with it. We've known how to build houses and shelters since people became aware of their own humanity. When they stepped out of caves, they knew to go back into that to get shelter. It doesn't take much. We don't need to learn how to build houses or apartments. We just need to have the will to do something about it.

There are two ways to do so. We can build more housing, and we urge you to do that, more affordable housing. We can also put more money into rental assistance. You can put money into it. That's what it takes. It takes the will and the dollars. And frankly, if you spend \$30 million this year in

addition, you can provide rental assistance to another 5000 families or more who need that help. That's \$30 million well spent. That's people who are struggling to make it. That's people who are on disabilities who are really faced with an impossible situation. It's people working at the \$8-an-hour job when they need a \$15-an-hour job. Money well spent, because that's the heart of our economy.

I saw an article in the paper yesterday about the problem with that 6000-person waiting list for developmental disabilities, and they said the main problem was they couldn't get enough workers to work in the facilities. And what were they paying them? Eighteen thousand dollars a year. And now they're going to raise it to 20. Well, you can't live on \$20,000 a year if you're a single parent or even a two-parent family with a person with a disability or children in it. You can't do it. So we're proposing to pay people to take care of other people, money that they can't use to take care of themselves. How does that make any sense? Either we provide them with the kind of housing assistance that lets them work at an \$18,000-a-year job, or we have to raise the wages to enable them to afford the rents and the other costs that exist here. So we have to take steps to do that. We suggest you spend more money on rental assistance, as well as address the income side of it, too.

The other thing we would urge you to do is there should be an emergency assistance program for people who are not now eligible for any help, a person who's struggling at a low-wage job who is unable to pay their rent. And if you do the math, you'll find that a person making \$8 an hour doesn't have enough to pay all of their expenses and faces homelessness. They should be able to get the same emergency benefits that a person who is on public

assistance gets or an SSI recipient gets. So we urge you to create that program, expand the current program to serve that population, those many people who wouldn't want to be homeless. You'll hear from people today who are homeless in that context precisely because they fell into that trap.

So again, I want to thank you for having this hearing. I urge you to look at the recommendations we've made. We're more than willing to help you. We have some drafts of legislation, if you'd be interested, on these issues. The other materials in this packet, I think, support all of the things that I've said and other people will say. And again, it's high time we did something about this. We have many people here who are only trying to make it in our economy, who are only trying to be the kind of good citizens that we all want them to be and encourage them to be, but they need help. You have the ability to do that. So we ask you to do it.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you. Next one.

MS. GARCIA: Ana Santiago.

A N A S A N T I A G O: Hi. My name is Ana Santiago. I moved here six years ago from Connecticut. I applied for low-income housing. It's been six years I haven't been-- I haven't-- They haven't written to me or anything saying I'm on the waiting list, I'm on the waiting list. Right now, I'm at a motel in Point Pleasant with my two girls. They expect me to get a two-bedroom apartment for 638 with no bills, and they're only going to help me 24 months. Right now, I'm hurt. I was working. I got hurt. I'm trying to get disability now, because I can't work. I can't provide for my kids, and I don't want to lose my kids, because they're everything to me. So it's hard.

Housing is -- on the list, on the list. I go and apply everywhere. I went to Berkeley. I went to Lakewood. They had Monmouth, who was having housing raffles. I went everywhere. I mean, all they do is put me on a list. I've been six years on a list for low income. I was living with my family. I can't live with my family, because they can't have me and the kids. It's too much. So they threw me out. So I've been in a motel since December, and I've been looking. It's not like I'm sitting there, you know, trying to take advantage of the system. I want to get out of that motel and give my kids the life that they need. So it's kind of hard.

I'm on public assistance now. I only get 424. On 424, I can't afford housing. And even when I was working, I was getting 7.31 an hour. I couldn't make it, not at that. I have to have somebody to take care of the kids. I have to have my own transportation, and I had to pay for my insurance and everything. I couldn't do it. So now I got hurt, and it's worse, because I thought I could get help, and all they say is put me on a list. From what I'm seeing is, I was on Page 5, now I'm on Page 6 for a two-bedroom. So they keep pushing me back or they don't call you or anything. They just-- Where am I going to live? If they throw me out of the motel, I would have nowhere to go with my kids, and I don't want to lose my kids. So, you know, it's hard.

Rental assistance keeps going -- they keep saying you're on the waiting list, but it's like they're pushing you back instead of pushing you forward. And there's people that sometimes don't need it, and they get it. I'm struggling. It's hard because I'm single. Their father don't help me. So it's hard for me. I don't know. Rental assistance is just -- keep pushing back and back and back. It's hard. I don't know. One thing is, I don't want to lose my kids,

because I don't have housing or I don't have food for them or anything, because my kids are everything to me. If I could work, I would be working, but I can't.

So, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

The next one, please.

MS. GARCIA: Francis E. Dolan from the Catholic Charities.

FRANCIS E. DOLAN: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Committee members. First, I'd like to commend you on your attention to the issue of the lack of affordable housing in New Jersey. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the urgent need for more rental assistance for working poor families with children, the disabled, and senior citizens.

I am Francis Dolan, Executive Director of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton. We provide a wide array of social and behavioral health-care services to people in need throughout Mercer, Monmouth, Ocean, and Burlington counties. Through our many programs and services, we see daily the enormous struggles faced by the working poor families and the disabled and senior populations on fixed incomes to maintain their independence and provide a decent life for themselves. Despite unprecedented prosperity and extensive affluence, the economic hardships and struggles facing poor people in the counties of the Diocese has never been greater.

I have information regarding the housing costs here in New Jersey that you've heard from several people, so I won't repeat that. But suffice it to say, the issue is the tremendous cost of housing in this state and the lack of affordability.

Catholic Charities last year conducted an agency-wide assessment, which included focus groups of consumers who use our wide variety of services. The number one issue and concern that our consumers voiced, regardless of the type of service they were receiving from us, was the lack of decent, affordable housing. We certainly see the impact of this every day in the individuals and families we serve.

Over the past decade, we have faced the dual challenge of rising rents and decreasing stock of affordable housing at the same time that thousands of people have been moved off the welfare rolls and into low-wage jobs. For our working poor families making a minimum wage-- I'll also move past that. It's information that's already been testified to in terms of simply not having sufficient income to pay the cost of -- even the most -- the lowest cost of rental housing.

Our emergency services program clearly experiences the impact of lack of affordable housing and what it has on the success of Welfare to Work related programs. The transitional housing program for TANF recipients faces this issue frequently. In addition to the scarcity of affordable rentals, there is difficulty in getting landlords to accept Section 8 vouchers for those clients who are able to get them when funding is available.

Our transitional housing program experiences a backlog in moving clients out of transitional housing once they have found employment and are ready to be self-sufficient. They have done everything to comply with welfare, but cannot find a place to move to that they can afford and won't put them back on the streets again. This has been our ongoing experience with transitional housing programs in each of the counties we provide this service in.

Working families can be successful and stable in the program mostly because they are only paying a portion -- 30 percent to 35 percent -- of their income for rent. Once they reach their time limit, however, finding a permanent home where they will only have to pay this amount for rent is virtually impossible.

While some families improve their skills to obtain higher paying jobs, for many this is simply not possible. In Burlington and Ocean counties, where we operate emergency service programs, the waiting list for Section 8 vouchers has been closed for years. Any special rental subsidy programs that exist usually do so with very long waiting lists. Our experience has also shown us that individuals and families who have had rental assistance for years have been stable in their housing. While they may come to emergency services for food assistance, at least their housing costs are affordable, and they do not need assistance with paying their rent. Most of the families who seek assistance with overdue rent payments are doing so because the rent was never affordable to them, and they are on a constant treadmill of trying to keep up.

I urge you to consider the following to improve services and funding to help those persons who are homeless or continually at risk of homelessness. While we believe that immediate action is needed to create additional rental assistance vouchers, we also believe that more systemic approaches are needed to increase the stock of quality affordable housing in our local communities. I have three recommendations, and actually two of the three mirror recommendations that you just heard from Connie from Legal Services.

Number one, increase funding for rental assistance for post-TANF recipients. The Rental Assistance Program currently administered by the Department of Community Affairs and implemented through county welfare

agencies has only 400 vouchers available. A State-funded, statewide program is needed to reach all who are trying to transition from welfare to entry-level jobs. Please support an allocation in the Fiscal Year 2002 budget for additional rental assistance and housing-related benefits to families recently transitioned off of welfare.

Number two, more vigorously enforce the law requiring landlords to accept renters with Section 8 vouchers. Although the law currently prevents landlords from discriminating against applicants with Section 8 vouchers, many renters in practice find themselves repeatedly turned away from housing. While landlords do not expressly reject an applicant based upon the use of a Section 8 voucher, it is evident that renters seeking to use the vouchers are not given equal consideration. In an otherwise highly competitive rental market, low-income renters seeking to utilize Section 8 vouchers are at an insurmountable disadvantage.

And third and finally, create additional Section 8 vouchers to provide housing subsidies to more low-income households. The current number of Section 8 vouchers available is clearly inadequate to meet current needs in the high-cost housing market such as New Jersey. The rapidly rising cost of housing in New Jersey has put market-based housing out of reach for a growing number of households. Long-term housing subsidies are needed to assist families in maintaining housing and avoiding the risk of homelessness.

I urge you to support these measures. In one of the most affluent states in the country during a time of great prosperity, there is no reason to witness a growing number of hardworking neighbors and some of the most vulnerable citizens struggle with the perils of homelessness. Resources must be

made available to fund programs and services to help low-income households find and maintain affordable housing.

Thank you again for your commitment to this issue. We very much appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to working with you on this critical issue. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Mai-Tai McDonald.

MAI - TAI M c D O N A L D: First of all, I really want to thank everyone for allowing me to come in front of you, and I really thank you.

Our group, Reach Out-Speak Out, we're kicking off our annual mental health month. But I'm here today on behalf of our mental health consumers in our community here, locally and statewide. And we urge you to, if any way possible, hear what the people are saying to you today. If you have to change your routine and come out into the community where you can see the real people where all this is affecting, you would be surprised. We couldn't get everybody down here today for you to see the real thing. And I'm so glad to see that the people have come here today from the different areas to give you an idea.

There is not enough money for anything that we're trying to do. I'm hitting the senior citizen level, and I'm hurting. Our older people need help, too, the same as the young folks, because they depend on us to help them and to guide them and to even help to take care of their children and everything. It's a shame to see the conditions that they have to live in with the little help that they're getting from these programs. It's just not enough. And the demand that is being put on them is an insult -- stay on welfare, get off welfare, go to school,

do this, do that. To us in the community, it's almost a big joke. And we're not cartoon writers. It may be a joke to some people, because they can get along on whatever they're doing, and they know how to adjust and manipulate and do whatever we have.

The people that we're here today for, they can't do that. And it's time that we stood up and backed them up, shared, cared, and increased all of this money. And if we have to make our own money somewhere, then let's do it. But it's time-- This is a new era. You want us to do so much -- do this, do that -- and yet there's a roadblock in every way we move. There's a stumbling stone, and it has to stop. These people didn't come up in a different area just because they didn't have anything to do. We've been out here advocating for a long time. A lot of us look at today might be our last chance, and I'm not trying to be funny or uppity with you.

I brought what the little kids told me. In my community, they call me Mommy Mai-Tai, I guess because I'm there all the time. These are saltine crackers (indicating). The crumbs are in the bottom of this. We're tired of getting crumbs. And I didn't bring any peanut butter and jelly to share with you. I brought what the little kids gave me. They wanted to come today, but they couldn't. His mother had a hard time, because she had a baby. She got put off of welfare, and she couldn't get in school. She went to Mercer County Community College. She got disgusted, because the time that she spent down there -- was talking about this, that, and the other -- and it wasn't getting to her what she thought she was supposed to be getting to get off of welfare.

Our community statewide is tired of the crumbs, and I've shared this with you not to be feisty or insulting, but this is the way the people in the

community feel. They're tired of crumbs. They're tired of all the demands and not getting anything, and there's not enough money to do anything. And if you have a program for the landlords of the minority population in the area, let's get together and bring them in, and maybe we have to teach them some things, too. We have to share. We have to share what you're trying to tell us to do that we have to do in order to get it, but we have to teach them also. We have to stop ignoring them and put the funds out and help them. And you have to do something for the older folks, the senior citizens. We need a break, too.

And with that, I really thank everybody for letting me speak. I really have to get back across the street, because we're kicking off mental health month. Thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Pat Cash from the Interfaith Network.

P A T C A S H: Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Pat Cash, and I'm with the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Ocean County.

You've heard all the staggering statistics. I work with the families who are homeless in Ocean County. It is families, and they come to me fearful. They're afraid they're going to lose their children, because they don't have housing. They have to make choices all along the way. Do I pay my rent? Do I take care of my child's health issues? Do I make sure that car keeps running so I can get back and forth to work? We see these struggles every day.

Interfaith has hundreds of volunteers that provide shelter and food and supportive services to the families. And what we're seeing is, we thought if we gave them this opportunity to take a breath, get their lives somewhat in order, and get back into housing, that would be an answer. But what we're seeing is, they're coming back to us struggling. Section 8s aren't available.

When they are, they still can't find the housing. Landlords are finding all kinds of ways around it. They're doing all the things that we want them to do as good Americans, and they're just not making it.

The families that are in program right now-- I've been there four years. There are maybe 14, 15 families that could come through in a year. I still have the same families from the beginning of the year. We can't get them out into housing. And as I said, even when the Section 8s do come in, it's still a struggle. We don't have much housing out there. There's so many decisions that they need to be making between transportation, child care, and all of the other struggles that they need to meet with.

And the things that Connie Pascale and Mr. Wise said and the others who have spoken so eloquently before me are so important. We're just finding that the working poor families that are struggling so hard to make it, they want lives for their children, they don't want to be in homeless shelters, and that. And there aren't the answers right now. So, hopefully, by being able to have this conference and be able to talk about the issues-- And certainly, I want to get off of here, because I want you to hear the families that have come to talk about their real lives.

So thank you very much for this opportunity.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

Next one.

MS. GARCIA: Sarah Lee McGrady

S A R A H L E E M c G R A D Y: Good morning, everybody. My name is Sarah Lee McGrady. I'm in Interfaith Hospitality Network in Lakewood, and I've been there since January. I have three kids, and I have a husband. He's the

only one working, and it's been hard. I tried everything. I called -- God knows -- everybody to try to get help. They just didn't do anything.

The point is about-- The reason why I'm really here today is the point there is not enough housing at all in Lakewood. There's not enough housing at all. I mean, people building in this day, building this house, building that house, but it's not for us, and it's not enough. I mean, they built a Lakewood Stadium, baseball stadium for \$17 million, which it should have gone for low-income affordable housing. I feel that was a need. It's called a family. It should be for the family. I mean, a baseball field is before a family. I feel that that was not right, and people now are homeless. And for one, I am, too. This is just not enough. They just need more housing.

When you do get the Section 8, when you do get it, it's not long that you get offered it, because you can't find housing. You can't find the housing that you need. Like anybody was just saying that was just up here talking, the landlord don't accept Section 8. They give you 60 days to find housing once you get on Section 8. That's not enough time. They said if you get -- once you get on, you can't find housing in 60 days, you come back to them, they will give you an extension. But the extension is over, they say you will be off the Section 8 and somebody else will move on, but there's not enough.

They built a place-- I looked in a -- the newspaper. I called them up. It said affordable housing. I'm all -- jump for joy. I was like -- maybe this opportunity. I called them and I said, I see in the paper here there's affordable housing. Oh, she said, "Yes, two bedroom, \$1200." Affordable? I mean, I didn't get that. I really didn't get that at all. Affordable housing she put in the

paper-- I mean, they have it in the paper, advertise it, but a two-bedroom, \$1200. You talk about over 30,000 a year to get in there. My husband don't even make that. My husband works at Wal-Mart bringing in 17,000 a year. So it's really hard.

And that's why I really wanted to come today and speak on that, because a lot of people right now don't have nowhere to go, and it's very hard. I mean, when you ain't got the-- I mean, you work a minimum wage, \$7 or \$8 -- I mean, 5.15 on up to \$7 or \$8 -- that's still not enough to jump out there and own a place. My husband brings home \$400-something every two weeks. That's still not enough to jump out there with three kids.

I called DYFS to see if they could help me. She said, "Yeah, I can help you. I would have to put your kids in foster care." I'm not abusing my child. I know I'm homeless, but I'm not abusing my kids -- to take my kids away. That's what it's for. This is for family. Section 8 is for family, because the lady told me to call to see if she could help me with the Section 8. She said, "No." She said, "The only thing we can help you with is putting the kids in foster care, and then you will get your kid--" It would hard for me to get my kids back once I give you my kids, but why would I want to give you my kids if I'm not abandoning my -- I'm not hurting my kids? In fact, I just don't have a house. And that is what Section 8 is really for. It's for families. That's what it's really based on. It's for families. If I don't have my kids, what do I need Section 8 for? It's for families and for being together and trying to find a home for your family.

Right now, today, it's really hard. I've been there since January at the Interfaith Hospitality Network. I've been there since January. This is May,

May 3rd. I'm just-- That's why I came today, so you all could hear what I had to say. I hope you all can just do something about that -- about getting more housing, because there's not enough in Lakewood at all. And that's what I wanted to say today. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Arnold Cohen, Housing and Community Development Network.

A R N O L D C O H E N: Assemblyman Cottrell, members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak and for holding this hearing on a very critical subject.

As you've heard, New Jersey is the most expensive state in the nation to rent a two-bedroom apartment. With the sheet I gave out to you, it shows the cost through -- in different counties in New Jersey and how over 40 percent of the renter population cannot afford the cost of a two-bedroom apartment. There's an acute lack of rental assistance, as you've already heard. In New Jersey, there's over 100,000 people on waiting lists for rental assistance from DCA or one of the other 80 public housing authorities in the state.

Last year, although the Department of Community Affairs had a waiting list of 16,000, it could only apply and succeeded in obtaining 429 new vouchers. Because of Federal formula, New Jersey is limited in the amount of new vouchers it can obtain from the Federal government in any single year, and the amount of new vouchers that will be available in any year depend upon congressional action.

The other problem, as you've heard, is that people with a voucher could often have a difficult time finding a landlord who will accept the voucher.

Last year, New Jersey initiated two small rental assistance programs, one for mental health consumers and the other for working people who have left welfare within the past six months or who are currently on welfare. Both these programs combined serve under 1000 people. This state commitment needs to be expanded on.

We need to do more in three areas: One is expand rental assistance; two is expand affordable housing production; and three, expand voucher utilization. I just want to spend a minute talking about each of those three areas.

First, expand rental assistance: An efficient way to deliver more rental assistance is to put a small additional subsidy into housing that already has a subsidy. About 3000 units of quality, affordable housing are built in New Jersey each year that have some sort of State subsidy. Unfortunately, the cost to develop this housing with the limited subsidy does not allow a developer to rent this housing to people making below \$20,000 a year. So what we have is a strange situation of people not earning enough money to live in affordable housing. With a small additional subsidy, we can make this affordable housing available to the disabled living on SSI, seniors living off their social security check, and single parents earning under \$10 an hour.

Affordable housing typically charges about \$500 for a two-bedroom apartment. A working parent earning \$6 an hour, or about \$1000 a month, can afford a \$300 a month rent. The cost of helping this family afford affordable housing would be \$200 a month. This is far cheaper than subsidizing a private landlord to house the same family. In the private sector, it would cost \$500 to \$600 to subsidize the rent for the same family. With this program, the State

could help 400 families for every \$1 million spent. Clearly, this program would limit the choice to available affordable housing. But with this kind of program, the State could serve three times as many people with the same cost.

The second area is expanding affordable housing production. The principal program with which New Jersey supports affordable housing production is in DCA's Balanced Housing Program, in effect since 1985 and funded through a portion of the Realty Transfer Tax. The amount of that tax fluctuates from a high of \$36 million a year to as little as \$13 million a year in the early 1990s. Implementing a comprehensive housing strategy will place additional demands on this program, making additional funding critical. This could be accomplished by redirecting a larger share of existing realty transfer revenues to the Balanced Housing Program.

The second most significant housing program is the Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program administered by the State Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency. That will be funding about \$15 million worth of affordable housing construction in New Jersey by the year 2003. That currently supports the construction of between 1300 and 1400 low-income rental units per year. New Jersey could do what six or seven other states have done and create a complementary state program. If enacted, that program would increase affordable rental housing by 1000 or more units each year. There's currently a bill before the Assembly and the Senate, A-2451 and A-1137 (*sic*), which has passed initial committees, which would increase that affordable housing production.

Finally, we need to do more to make vouchers -- to increase the use of vouchers. The Department of Community Affairs has a model program that

should be expanded. The Regional Opportunity Counseling program, or ROC program, currently counsels voucher holders about current opportunities, especially in the suburbs, to use their vouchers. This is especially important because that's where the jobs are for people to be able to earn more money. What we're suggesting is, is that this program be expanded statewide and that it also encourage people to use the new Section 8 home ownership program that will become available later this year and any state funded rental assistance program that is in existence.

And finally, we need to say that we support people's efforts to make sure that any person who is facing a financial hardship not go without a lack of shelter, that that should be a right for anybody in the state. New Jersey needs to make sure that any holes that are there in the safety net be repaired.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and the Housing and Community Development Network is available and anxious to work with the Committee in developing legislation that will help those in New Jersey who have this need. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

The next witness, please.

MS. GARCIA: Tysha M. Brewton.

T Y S H A M. B R E W T O N: Hi. My name is Tysha M. Brewton, and I came here today. I want to speak about a few issues that--

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Is that light on? (referring to PA microphone) Okay.

MS. BREWTON: I want to talk about a few issues about disability. I've been living in Lakewood for eight years, and I filled out an

application also for the Rental Assistance Program. They tell me that there's a waiting list. Every time I call, I tell them that I put my application in two years ago. They tell me I'm still on a waiting list. I'm 1000-and-something on a waiting list. I have a son. I have a disabled husband, living in a one-bedroom apartment, got to pay water, gas, lights. He's the only one working. I'm out from a bad back, been out ever since May. He gets social security, no Medicaid, only Medicare. Medicare doesn't cover our family. It's hard. It's hard when you have to pay a lot of bills, rent. And now, he's supporting me and my son, and rental assistance would help us out a lot if they would see what the problem is.

They send me the paperwork in the mail to fill out. We fill the paperwork out, and we send everything back to them, and there's a different story. I mean, if they know if you're not going to be placed or if you're going to be called first on a list or whatever, they shouldn't even send them out if they're not going to call anybody. I mean, we struggle in Lakewood. Like everybody said, we need affordable houses where we can afford our rent and bills and stuff. People have to eat, have to travel to get somewhere. I mean, you can't lean on somebody else's shoulder for something. That's what the programs are here for -- to help.

The other issue I want to talk to you about is about -- when a person is not happy where their town is or whatever-- I vote every year for Lakewood. I'm a voter. I vote every year for Lakewood. I consider Lakewood should issue out something for some of the people that's in Lakewood also, not just one person, three persons on the list. I mean, everybody is here for something, and everybody here that's in here is here for something. They want

me here for everybody to listen to what they have to say about the issues that's going on. We do need help. And if everybody can open their ears and listen, it would mean a great deal. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

Next one, please.

MS. GARCIA: Marlene Lao-Collins of the New Jersey Catholic Conference.

MARLENE LAO - COLLINS: Good morning, Chairman Cottrell and members of the Committee.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Good morning.

MS. LAO-COLLINS: The New Jersey Catholic Conference, which is the public policy arm of the Catholic Bishops, appreciates this opportunity to comment on the concerns of the Bishops related to housing. I also would like to add that my colleagues in the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in New Jersey, Reverend Bruce Davidson, and who also represents the New Jersey Council of Churches, asked that I mention their names and express that they are equally concerned with this issue and support the recommendations that we will make.

The Catholic Bishops believe strongly that all people have a right to decent, affordable housing. That right is based in the inherent dignity and priceless worth that each individual has, because he or she is created in the image of God. That fundamental right is violated when in New Jersey thousands of individuals, including children, are homeless, scores of families have to double and triple up in homes or living in substandard housing. An

adequate response to this devastating housing problem requires a strong political will and a commitment on the part of all members of our society.

In the last decade -- in fact, someone earlier said that we are a blessed nation, and indeed we are -- New Jersey has experienced unprecedented low unemployment rates and has seen tremendous growth in income. Overall, we have been described as a wealthy state. Upon closer examination, we discover that the lion's share of the growth is among those in the upper end of the scale earning an average of \$165,958, representing 20 percent of New Jersey's households. All other groups experienced a drop in their real income. So that despite this economic strength, the crisis for very low-income people has grown greater, because, while their income diminished, the real cost of living continued to increase, causing greater gaps between what people earn and what it costs to live in New Jersey. And you've heard testimony to that effect today.

Housing is the largest portion of most family budgets. I know it is for me. Standards used by Federal housing assistance programs recommend housing costs should be no greater than 30 percent of the total income. Yet, about 288,000 families pay more than half their income for housing and more than 900,000, or one-third of New Jersey families, live in housing that is excessively expensive, overcrowded or substandard. Even when existing programs create affordable housing -- and we heard something here earlier -- those on fixed income or earning below \$10 per hour are too poor to qualify.

Recently, the Department of Human Services launched a \$2.5 million rental assistance program to assist about 400 families moving from welfare to work. This is a small program limited to individuals earning up to 150 percent of the Federal poverty level. It is clear that much more needs to be

done or too many children and families will continue to live in homeless shelters, in substandard conditions, or worse yet, have to make choices between eating and paying the rent. This is not so far-fetched. Organizations such as Catholic Charities frequently see these struggling families come to our food pantries.

We ask you to support efforts that would, one, increase a supply of affordable housing, such as the New Jersey Multiple Dwelling State Tax Credit, A-2591, and there is a Senate bill, S-1137; efforts that would preserve and revitalize existing affordable housing units such as A-2592 and S-1138; efforts that would protect against repealing the *Mount Laurel* decision; and that you create a rental assistance program for low-income families paying over 30 percent of their income towards rent.

We applaud you, Chairman Cottrell, for taking the leadership in holding this hearing. We thank you for that. The New Jersey Catholic Conference looks forward to working with you and others in addressing the state's housing problem.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

Next one, please.

MS. GARCIA: William Robinson.

WILLIAM ROBINSON: Yes. My name is William Robinson, and I'm homeless. I want to let you know a little bit about me. I did 11 years in the military and two years of college. It's a shame for me to have to sit here and say I'm homeless. I'm living in a mission. The mission has mice in it -- little things running around. I've been there since February. In February, I got to see

Trenton more than what I used to see Trenton. Besides that, it's -- I used to see Trenton as a big, familiar place, happy to be here, happy to see everything. And to find out that Trenton is one of the most wealthiest cities in our country is a shock.

I work in the military -- I mean, New Jersey State Labor Board, the New Jersey State Labor Board. I work there. I find out that the little that I know-- I only make \$4-and-some cents a month -- I mean, every pay period. That's what I bring. I don't make \$5 an hour. I make \$4-and-some cents a month. I look back and see all this money. There is big money being spent. I see big money every day -- checks being written out for 19,000, 10,000, stuff like that. These people are making big money, and we do not make any money. I don't understand it. Why are we working so hard? I'm handicapped. I make SSD. I make SSD. I make SSD, but I don't have no place to stay. I don't have a place to stay.

My clothes-- What do I do with my clothes when I got to go to work? I got to work. What do I do with them? Leave them out there for somebody to come along that needs some clothes and pick them up and take them? We are in trouble. We got to watch it. We got to watch each and every one of those. And what we do today is to go and judge all those. I don't understand why we-- I go to -- what do they call it? -- the Soup Kitchen. I go to the Soup Kitchen. I listen to him. I listen to the man who says everything, and I understand what he's talking about, because this thing is urgent. It's urgent. For all these children and all these kids and people-- They are not working. They're working day by day, day by day. They're trying to make it.

I walked over here from the train station up here. I had to make it up here, because I felt like somebody needs to hear this. Somebody needs to do something. I just pray that somebody knows -- that somebody needs to do something about this. I pray to God that everybody listen to this and everybody takes heed, because some things are going-- He's going to watch everything we do. He's watching everything we do. And I pray to God, listen to us. Besides, you know God's listening to us, because we need help. We need help.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

Next one.

MS. GARCIA: Keith Alan Jennings.

KEITH ALAN JENNINGS: I want to thank everyone for listening to me today and for everyone that has showed up. I'm in a current situation where I am also homeless. Ever since I have lived in Ocean County, I've always paid between \$1000 and \$1300 a month in rent. I've applied for affordable housing and different things around the town, but I've always been told, "You make too much money. The income between you and your wife, you make too much money. You can't make it with the affordable housing."

Just recently, I've been put in a situation where I was laid off from my computer firm. I was renting a three-bedroom home in Bricktown, New Jersey, where my rent was \$1200 a month, trying to just maintain bills and expenses and everything else. My wife and I try to do the best that we can. I lived off my social security, the little bit of savings, and everything that I've had. I've been put in a situation right now where I'm like out on the street also. I have three kids, and I'm currently living in a hotel, which actually is only

enough room for me and my wife and for two of my kids. I have one of my daughters staying with a friend.

I'm also in a situation where the housing is about the place where we currently live -- I'm about to lose the housing because I have a certain amount of time to stay there. I don't have support or help from any other relatives or friends. I've been to different agencies and things around town to get assistance, to get rental assistance, to apply for affordable housing. I've just been told that there's a long waiting list. You have to wait. I'm running out of time. The last thing that I really have to rely on right now is going to a shelter, and I might be put in a situation where I will possibly be separated from my wife and my kids. I've tried every possible thing that I can do. I have no more options.

I just hope that if something can be done, that there can be more programs and things to help working-class people, people with disabilities, pretty much anything to help people with rental assistance, affordable housing, and just make things available for people and not have such high standards. That's pretty much all I have to say for today.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

MR. JENNINGS: Thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Mary Ellen Marino, HomeFront, New Jersey Alliance.

MARY ELLEN MARINO: Thank you very much. My name is Mary Ellen Marino. I'm with HomeFront, a nonprofit in Mercer County that works with homeless families, and I'm also very involved with the New Jersey

Alliance for the Homeless, which is a statewide organization that consists of maybe 40 members.

At least 50 organizations have signed on in support of a piece of legislation which we hope will come before this Committee very soon for additional emergency assistance. I've given each of you a copy of the legislative package that the Alliance has produced in support of this particular piece of legislation.

You've heard about the fact that emergency assistance is provided by the State for people with -- on TANF or general assistance or SSI. But given the fact that about two-thirds of the welfare rolls disappeared in the past three years -- they disappeared into the low-wage employment that you've heard so much about today -- there are now twice as many people in danger of falling through the cracks of the system and falling into homelessness.

The examples, the individual examples you've heard, of people either on welfare where they're making a maximum of \$5000 a year or minimum wage jobs where they're making about \$10,000 a year, all of this well below the Federal poverty level. The outrageousness of having people who are making far more than that being rejected for affordable housing in New Jersey because they don't make enough money-- You have to make about \$39,000 a year to afford affordable housing under the guidelines of COAH.

So there are a lot of statistics in here (indicating). I'd like to maybe just bring up a few of the more recent ones that haven't been brought up by some of my other colleagues, and then maybe tell you a couple of individual examples.

Mathematica completed a research report for the Department of Human Services in November of this year, and they found that while surveying both current and former welfare-- In other words, the whole spectrum of folks that have been on welfare, but are now off, as well as those on welfare, they found that 23 percent of their clients experienced a housing crisis in that past year. One-fourth of the working poor and the welfare clients experienced a housing crisis, which meant either their utilities were shut off for nonpayment, they became homeless, they had to go into a homeless shelter, or they doubled up with other family members.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services provided some snapshot statistics for a hearing similar to this that Senator Shirley Turner ran earlier this year. In one month for the people that were eligible for their emergency assistance, they spent, in one month, \$2.3 million for emergency assistance to TANF families and \$1.6 million for emergency assistance to those who were on general assistance. So we're talking about essentially \$4 million -- \$4 million in one month for those who were eligible for emergency assistance. But at the same time the very small pot of money that is currently available for an entire year is \$10 million for those people who don't qualify for these programs, those who have been off of welfare for more than six months or who've never asked for cash assistance who've been trying to make it in our economy.

The New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless has found that the shelter capacity of this state has been-- There is a need that's at least doubled what the shelter capacity is. They've had to turn away people. As many people as they've been able to serve, they've had to turn away. Then they have found out

in the past year, our member organizations, that there's been a 40 percent increase in the need of the working poor for seeking assistance.

I haven't heard people coming here to tell you some of the stories that have come across my desk day after day at HomeFront, because it's not just the people whose husbands have abused them and they have to get out of their marriages and try to make it with many children and no assistance. I've helped those people. They're not just the folks who have been on cash assistance for many years and are not able to make it. I've also had at least four clients who have come to me because their houses are being taken away from them. They're going into foreclosure in some cases, because a husband has taken off and is not providing assistance. In other cases, a husband and wife are intact families, but because of the economy, they're not able to make enough money to pay their mortgages.

There are so many stories. I won't take your time further, but I will urge you to look at the information provided in our packet and to please consider the legislation that should come before your Committee shortly, hopefully, Assembly Bill No. 3236, which is also -- a companion bill in the Senate, Senate Bill No. 2095, that asks for an \$8 million additional supplemental money for those people who are not helped by the existing programs, who are not connected to existing welfare.

They are asking for help for veterans, \$2 million for veterans. There are 7000 veterans that are homeless in this state right now, according to the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs -- 7010. They counted them. The Department of Human Services doesn't count how many homeless there are, and it's very difficult to count the homeless, because sometimes it's just one

boyfriend, one paycheck, one family member dispute that makes a family homeless, but there are many, many families that are in that situation.

Please bring this bill up, please? Also listen to all the people who have begged for more rental assistance. That is what I have been able to help some of our clients to do. I've been able to help clients move -- at least four clients move out of Trenton into neighborhoods closer to their jobs, closer to schools and areas where their children don't have to face drug pushers and prostitutes on a daily basis, so that they can make and believe in themselves to make a better live for themselves.

We need more rental assistance, and we need desperately to have enforcement of the law that says that rental assistance can't be denied by landlords. Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you very much.

MS. GARCIA: Felice Tunison from HomeFront.

FELICE C. TUNISON: Good morning. My name is Felice Tunison, and I reside in Lawrence Township. I've been a single parent for some years now, and my son and I have lived in Lawrence Township since he was born. He's 13.

About a month ago, we weren't being offered another lease where we lived in the same place for those 13 years, so I wanted to continue to reside in Lawrence Township, because he was established in his schools and sports and things. In those 13 years, the rent increase in Lawrence Township is astronomical, so now to keep him in a decent school system and everything, which is really one of my priorities, I'm faced with a rent that's practically 1000 a month.

I'm handicapped. Now my situation has changed. I have MS, and I'm on disability, so I have a fixed income. And it's going to be real rough without rental assistance of some sort to maintain him there and to take care of myself. I looked at-- I've been put on a list. I applied-- I'm sort of new to getting into rental assistance and those types of things. I'm going to have to look into the other programs that the State might be able to help me with on being on disability and being a single parent and trying to raise my son.

I find that you fall into a crack no matter how hard you're trying. I never had to really be in this position. And because I've gotten this disease, it's put me somewhere I'm totally unfamiliar with. I'm getting scared, because my life is starting to spiral downwards, and I've worked real hard to maintain where I'm at and go to school and get a bachelor's degree and do all these things to try to have this money, and then I wind up with a disease that wipes all that out. I don't know really where to turn. And rental assistance would really help me and a lot of the people who are here. Everyone is really working at trying to be a good, upstanding citizen in society here, and things just don't work. And with you listening to everyone who needs the help, I hope you can come through on the bills and make a difference.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you very much.

MS. GARCIA: Brad Fields.

BRADFORD FIELDS: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bradford Fields. My attraction to this forum was motivated by a flyer advertising a legislative meeting on homelessness. My slant was, was this would be an ideal opportunity for me to express my appreciation for the fact that there

were certain programs and agencies in place within the State that afforded me an opportunity to change -- to climb up out of a negative situation. Perhaps my slant is somewhat different from the people that have preceded me, because I realize that the impetus of this session has been people in need of a certain type of assistance.

Let me qualify. Approximately 28 months prior to today, I was coming up on the end of an extended, long, and extensive run of alcohol and drug abuse. I'm out of Monmouth County. I attempted to put together a program of recovery that would bring me up out of this morass. Monmouth County is seriously deficient in those services or agencies that afford any type of assistance to a single, black male. I was made aware of the fact that Trenton might be a more opportunistic situation for me to pursue. And hence, I came to Trenton, and I discovered a new way of life. I've been afforded opportunities that be included -- and programs that I did not even know even existed in Monmouth County. And these are statewide programs, you know. So I'm really appreciative of the things that I've done up to this point.

The only other thing, outside of being appreciative, that I wanted to express was, I hear a lot of things about working poor families. Everyone has a group that they represent. I need to say at this point, over the course of these 28 months I have been in the adult rehabilitation center, three-quarter transitional housing situations, I've attended career training, and I've completed retraining. I have also been tutored in employment techniques.

Mr. Wise, earlier, made mention of a class called Multiple Barriers to Employment, and I think I fit into that very easily. I've been afforded an opportunity to build my esteem to a point where I think -- I don't see the

barriers that I saw at one time. I must express my sensitivity to brothers like myself who perhaps don't have the same type of motivation to take that first step, who are not familiar with the fact that there are agencies and programs available. I don't know exactly how they can be touched, but I see an underlying kind of discouragement for those that attempt to seek out any type of aid or assistance.

Because not so much, not like Monmouth County, a lot of the things that are going on remain privy only to a few. If someone is not plugged into a particular program, if a person has not made themselves particularly attractive to someone in the know, they tend to fall by the wayside or get lost in the general everyday hullabaloo just trying to survive.

I won't take it any further. I just thought that considering everything else that you're hearing, that it might be appropriate to express an appreciation, because all those things I would -- what I would like them to be, they are much better than they were, and I still look forward to them getting better. I pray that any concern and consideration you can give to, like, the particular group that I did make mention of would be greatly appreciated, because there are many less fortunate than myself that continue to struggle.

I thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

MS. GARCIA: Kenneth Beckett, Volunteers of America.

KENNETH BECKETT: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. Thank you for having this forum and allowing us to speak.

There are a couple points that I'd just like to talk about. Well, not a couple, but a few. There's a strong need for affordable housing in this state, and we also have to look at how we define what is affordable. If you look in the -- and pay attention to things that's going on, there's an increase in construction, but it is for high-priced housing, but there is no increase in affordable housing construction. There's a strong need for people who make just above minimum wage or minimum wage, so that they can afford to get housing. I hope that this Committee will look at that and look at the bills coming down and hopefully pay attention to and hopefully passing -- working to get them passed for more affordable housing.

The next thing I wanted to talk about was the need for more Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance. I am the Program Director for a transitional living facility here in the city of Trenton. Many of the individuals that complete or go through the transitional housing program that I run cannot find affordable housing. They can't find decent housing. They can't afford-- They just really can't afford it based on the jobs that they get. They are thankful for the jobs that they do get, but when you're making \$5, \$6, \$7 an hour and you bring home, on a month, \$880, you cannot -- you have to make a choice of whether or not you're going to pay rent, pay utilities, or buy food. It's really hard for individuals and families to try to make it on that kind of income. So we really need to look at what we can do to try and get some type of assistance in either more Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance or some other program for individuals and families that need this help.

The next point I wanted to talk about was the need for more emergency housing. There is a very strong need for more emergency housing

assistance. Many people -- and it could happen to any one of us in this room at any given time -- you come into a need for emergency assistance, housing assistance, if you're in a fire, if for some unforeseen reason you become disabled and cannot return to work and have to apply, not get yet, but just apply for disability and the length of time it takes until it comes through, if it comes through.

Work layoffs and different situations such as substance abuse, mental illness, underemployment, unemployment, these are people that for one reason or another may need emergency assistance, housing assistance, and it's an area that needs funding. It's an area that needs for people to pay attention to. We've heard from several individuals today expressing what's happened to them. And if it wasn't for some of the agencies in the area that have been working with the families, I wouldn't want to think where they would be now. So, if at all possible, in the areas of emergency housing, the area of more assistance in terms of Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance, and also in the area of affordable housing, building and maintaining affordable housing for people, I hope that this Committee will do something to bring that to the forefront and bring it to the rest of the legislators' attention so that we can deal with this and hopefully have it be a thing of the past.

Last, I just wanted to speak on the need for job training. There's a strong need for job training so that people can get better jobs so that they can afford better housing and afford to take care of their children. I'm not saying this to be smart or anything, but I would -- if you don't understand it, you need to spend the day in the system and see what a person goes through to try to access services that need services. It's very, very disheartening sometimes. So

that if we can do something to help people get job training so that they can get a decent job, they can get jobs making \$14 or \$15 an hour, so that they can better afford to take care of their families, it would be a great help.

And again, I'd like to thank you for holding this forum, for listening to not just me, but everyone else in the room, and as to the important need for more affordable housing and job training and other services for the homeless. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you.

The last speaker is--

MS. GARCIA: Peter (*sic*) Kerstner, K-E-R-S-T-N-E-R, greater Trenton. I'm sorry.

ROBERT KERSTNER: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. My name is Robert Kerstner. I work for Greater Trenton Community Mental Health Center on East State Street here. I work in Homeless Outreach, and I heard a lot of things today that are absolutely true. I work in the mix. I don't work behind a desk. I'm out in the mix. I work with Mr. Wise. I work with Captain Charles from the Salvation Army. I am also attending college, and I work with a lot of people who are in other programs that aren't here.

I just found out about this meeting at 4:00 yesterday afternoon when I was at the Soup Kitchen. Given a week, we would have had to have this in the Sovereign Arena. I know people from all over the state in every major city -- Morristown, Camden, Hackensack, Paterson, Passaic, Clifton. You name them, I know people there, and we're all going through the same thing. I, right now, am representing Trenton, the Trenton area.

We spend a lot of money on people for detoxification and mental illness, and rehabilitating them, helping them out, getting them on medication, stabilizing them, getting them off of drugs and alcohol, and we got nowhere to put them. The man before me spoke of emergency housing. There is none. We have so many problems here, and unless you're out in the mix every day, you don't see them, like Pennsylvania dumping all their mentally ill on us. We get them all here. They tell them there's not appropriate housing there, so they send them here because of the mission.

The mission just cut back. There's only 17 beds for women. If you go by the mission one day on Ewing Street and look out there and see the sadness and look at the desperation in these people's eyes, it's sad. They cut the men down from 175 to 74 beds. Where do these people go in the evening now? They're out in the streets. Our merchants are moving out, because the homeless are hanging out on the streets. We have nowhere for them. God Bless the Salvation Army Drop-In Center they just opened. They have a place to go during the day.

I go out, and I go to the merchants. I've been to them when it opened, and I handed them flyers so they could tell these people where to go. It's sad, it really is. And the truth of the matter is, we spend all this money on helping people and rehabilitation and whatnot, and it's like having a poodle you paid \$1000 for and sending it to the groomer and getting it groomed for \$200 and throwing it out in the backyard full of potholes and burrs. You know, it makes no sense. We need housing for these people. The Rescue Mission isn't the case. The Rescue Mission is an overnight thing.

There's a young lady with me here. She speaks Russian, Spanish -- well-educated woman. She's homeless, living in a rescue mission, and how can she go out looking for a job? Where is she supposed to put as an address? What is she supposed to do for herself? And there's many of them like her there. We have nurses there, but where do you put-- There's only room for 17 women. At 2:30 in the afternoon, they're standing out there, seven, eight women already. The rest of them have to go out in the street. They end up in prostitution, drug addiction. It's sad. We got nowhere to put them, nowhere.

My heart goes out to these people. Maybe sometimes I'm codependent or something, you know. I know there's hope. I know there's hope if they had housing, if they could get out of these programs, have somewhere to go where they could build up their self-esteem, feel good about themselves, get out there in the working-- For every dollar we spend to rehabilitate these people and get these people placement, we save the State \$7. It's a fact.

You heard all the figures on housing. We just don't have it. We have two beautiful high-rises right here in Trenton, hundreds of rooms in them. Why can't they be fixed up? We've got buildings all over. The only thing available today is the slumlords, and you can get a list right across the street for them. And how can these people feel good about-- You heard a woman with two children. She can't afford to stay in a room. These slumlords are taking advantage of our welfare system.

I think Trenton Psychiatric has a program that pays rents also. They want these people, the slumlords. The rooms aren't-- I've been in them. I wouldn't let an animal live in one of these rooms, and yet they want \$450,

\$500 a month. We're spending here in the motels \$900 to \$1500 a month to keep a homeless woman and her children in a motel room. You can get an apartment. If we had affordable housing, you could pay rent for three people, rather, \$500 a month. I personally know of 10 people over the age of 65, men and women, who are homeless or living in the street. It breaks my heart. They shouldn't be. They shouldn't be.

We need that housing. The only way we're going to get it is if you people help us to help these people by giving us this. That's all I have.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Thank you. That was the last statement. And what I have to say is, I thank everybody for being patient. I thank the Committee for being patient. I'm a great believer, if I'm going to present a bill, I want to put in the real life of it, the real story, and that helps it to fill up legislation, know what people who are involved in it and who have come forward -- knows the situation. That information is very important. That's why we're having it recorded. We will print a copy of it, we will address it and see what legislation can come out of it. I thank you all for showing up, all who have testified, and everyone for being patient.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Mr. Chairman?

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: And I'll open, now, comments from the Committee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Thank you. I have a question.

We've heard a lot of excellent testimony, and it's clearly, I think, more than a problem with simply allocating money for rental subsidies. It

seems to me that it's a much broader problem. And I mean with all the testimony, we've heard about a lot of problems.

My specific question is, if we actually had more money for rental subsidies, is the housing actually there or do we have to look first to make more housing, more clean housing that's effective for people to live in? Is there anyone here that--

I know, Connie, that you've dealt with this issue for a long time.

MR. PASCALE: (speaking from audience) I think you need both. I think that there's a need for more subsidies, because some people are really in need.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Oh, I'm not denying that there's a need for more subsidies, but I'm just wondering if the housing stock is available.

MR. PASCALE: I mean, if you want--

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Why don't you come up on the mike, if you want to ask him some questions -- if anyone wants to ask him some questions?

MR. PASCALE: I think the supply is a problem, too, in the sense that I think we could house everybody in New Jersey in the housing that exists, but you'd be paying \$3000 a month rent in some of the places that exist.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Okay.

MR. PASCALE: I mean, the problem is, we have a large supply of high-end housing and not a large supply of really affordable housing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Okay.

MR. PASCALE: There are ways that it could be done. Our state, unlike every other state in the United States-- In every other state in the United States, mobile homes, manufactured housing is the primary means of supplying affordable housing. In every other state in the union, mobile homes are the way they house lower-income people, but our state has a lot of restrictions that prevent the use of mobile homes for one reason. I mean, there's an area where we might be able to rapidly increase the supply of affordable housing.

I suggest-- This is a suggestion that I have, because many people are afraid of the way it might look. They ought to have a competition. We ought to charge our architecture schools to come up with a design contest, to use mobile homes and design the paradigm mobile home park. You know, there would be a lot of people that would be interested in that. There would be a lot of communities that I think would welcome housing that was designed in that way. We should try to take advantage of the available technology to produce it.

But you're right, we do need to build more affordable units that with the subsidies would make it possible for people working at the jobs that are out there. But I think we could house everyone now, if we were willing to spend the money. And while it's a broad social problem, we could house everyone by spending the money. It's just a question of how much we're willing to spend. We certainly do need more production programs. You've heard about some of them today. There are opportunities to do more with it.

Now, I'll just mention one other. We have the Mount Laurel process, right, the COAH process. How many places are not-- How many municipalities have failed to meet the obligations that they have in that regard?

There's an enormous allocation of housing units that haven't been built. Maybe if we more strictly enforce the *Mount Laurel* process, we'd have more affordable housing. There's an area where you could pass legislation and make it mandatory instead of voluntary. So I would suggest those as alternatives that would produce more affordable housing. We just have to be willing to take the step.

And really, housing is a problem of the will. It's not technology. It's the question of having the will to provide a place for people to live. If we have that will, we'll do it. If we had a State law-- And I'll conclude by saying this. Our Constitution-- I represented people who were homeless who were seeking assistance, and basically our Constitution, our State government, does not provide a right to shelter. There is no right to shelter in New Jersey. This was conceded by all parties at a trial I was at and the courts. That is, if you're in the street with no place to go, our State does not have an obligation to help you. Maybe we have an obligation, legally imposed, to help children, so there's where we have a foster care system. But in terms of intact families or adults, there is no legal obligation in our state, constitutional or otherwise, that requires people to be sheltered.

We say that our Constitution does require that, but a court has never ruled that to this point. If we had that obligation, you know, the debate we have here would shift. It wouldn't then become a question of whether we should do something, it would be a question of how we should do something. So maybe again recognizing that shortcoming, if we had legislation at the very least that required -- recognized that everybody deserves a place to live, is entitled a place to live, it's a human right -- if we had that, maybe the debate

here would shift, and we'd find ways to do things for people that we could do, if we had the will to do it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VANDERVALK: Thank you.

MR. PASCALE: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYMAN COTTRELL: Anyone else have any questions?

(no response)

Adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)