

**Presentation of Communities of Faith United for Housing (CFUH)
At the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Budget Hearing
March 30, 2011**

Madam Chairman and Members of Board of Supervisors,

I'm Tom Devine, Chair of Communities of Faith United for Housing (CFUH). I live in the Mt. Vernon District, and worship at Aldersgate UMC, where I Chair the Missions and Outreach Council, and at Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church, in Lee District, where I Chair the Route One Ministry Board. I'm also a Trustee for New Hope Housing which provides shelter and transitional and permanent supportive housing for homeless men, women, and children in Mt. Vernon, Lee, and Mason Districts.

Our members consist of faith communities and individuals throughout the County who are similarly involved in efforts to assist the poorest of the poor. As individuals and faith communities, we have worked hard, on a volunteer basis, to provide shelter, meals, and services to the neediest people in our community, along with our advocacy to ensure continued funding for necessary County programs.

Many of us have been involved in the hypothermia prevention program; in fact our organization grew out of our members' participation in the program. In South County, for instance, emergency shelter is provided at Rising Hope each night throughout the winter season, and other area churches provide meals and volunteers to stay overnight and assist those who seek shelter. In other parts of the County, various churches rotate hosting the winter shelter, while others utilize a government facility.

The winter season of providing overnight shelter, meals and fellowship to homeless individual adults through the county-wide program is soon coming to an end. As the program winds down, upwards of 150 individuals who were provided shelter one night, will be without it the next night. They will return to living on the streets, in the woods, or perhaps in cars. Some of the faces that come through the doors of the hypothermia shelters have become all-too familiar winter after winter. Despite encouragement, support and local resources, some guests we work with have been trapped in a cycle of homelessness for years that will not end without greater, more permanent intervention.

Some have suggested that the answer is to extend the hypothermia program year round. We do not share that view. Instead, we share the vision you have embraced -- that the only way to break the debilitating cycle of homelessness is to provide permanent supportive housing for those families

and individuals who cannot obtain housing on their own. A sad fact to keep in mind is that 40% of people who are homeless are children under the age of 18. Without action to break the cycle of homelessness, these children will pay an emotional cost for the next 50 to 60 years. Keep in mind that a homeless 10-year-old today will be 18 by the time we expect to end homelessness in the County.

Even during these last few years of challenging budget times, the Board has been steadfast in supporting the provision of housing and services for those who are truly in need -- the poor, disadvantaged, and disabled persons in our community -- and it is these least fortunate people for whom we are advocating, and we ask you to keep them in mind as you make your final budget decisions.

On behalf of our entire organization, the churches we represent, and the homeless persons for whom we advocate, we thank you for the commitment to ending homelessness that you have demonstrated. Adoption of the Ten-Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness and the Housing Blueprint, provide a well-thought-out guide to implement the goal of preventing and ending homelessness in ten years. Maintaining your commitment to this effort by funding the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, while in the midst of a severe budget crisis, was critical to keeping the Plan on track, and we must continue to do so.

The Governing Board, chaired by Michael O'Reilly, and including the active participation of Chairman Bulova and Supervisor Hudgins, as well as business and community leaders, has made important strides in engaging the County's business community, as well as government, non-profit service providers, and faith communities in this important, yet challenging , effort.

OPEH, led by Dean Klein, has already made very impressive progress in developing a partnership among the County, faith communities, and non-profits to prevent and end homelessness, as envisioned by the Board. The ability to harness unexpectedly available federal stimulus dollars immediately to help homeless families and individuals, or to prevent others from becoming homeless, demonstrates the creativity and nimbleness of the organization in carrying out your vision.

CFUH is proud to be part of a new OPEH initiative to engage faith communities in the County more directly in the effort to develop and find permanent supportive housing for homeless families and individuals.

However, it is now two years into the 10-year effort, and we have only 8 years left to fulfill your vision of ending homelessness in the County. New

challenges arise, such as the expiration of federal stimulus funding. As you have grappled in the past few years with a serious budget crisis brought about by the national recession, people at the lowest rungs of the economic ladder have been hit even harder, and the impacts on them will persist longer. The Department of Family Services has been receiving requests for assistance in record numbers, and this mirrors requests for assistance at food pantries and other facilities run by our faith communities. Despite tremendous progress, there are still long waiting lists to get into shelters; some people truly have no place to live.

Even if there are no cuts to last year's budget for human services and housing, there have been cuts in previous years that were not restored; with increasing numbers of people needing help, keeping the budget the same, while certainly better than actual program cuts, still results in many unmet needs for human services.

There has been progress over the past few years in an effort to provide stable housing for the individuals who are with us over the winters, but the job is far from completed. Our faith communities recognize that overcoming the challenges that remain requires government, business, and non-profits in the community to work together. We ask you to continue to build partnerships and provide leadership to produce housing solutions, and we will work diligently with you.

Specifically regarding the 2012 budget, we implore you to continue your commitment to fully fund the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the Housing Blue Print. In addition, we ask you to hold the tax rate steady, at the advertised rate, so that funding is not cut for social service/housing programs. We recognize that County funding is not the entire solution to preventing and ending homelessness, but it is a critical component, particularly as federal and state funding expires or is otherwise cut.

We also urge you to explore other, non-budget, actions that can be taken, such as zoning initiatives and accommodations, in order to carry out your vision to prevent and end homelessness by 2019. In the coming weeks, we have scheduled individual meetings with each of you, and we look forward to exploring these concepts more fully in our discussions.

Thank you.