

Bring New Orleans *Home*

A UNITY Public Policy Action Agenda

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October 21, 2005

UNITY, a collaborative of sixty non-profit and governmental agencies, is committed to ending homelessness and bringing New Orleans *home*. Our mission is to

- Provide services to those who are homeless – those families and individuals who were homeless prior to Katrina, as well as those who have lost their homes as a result of Katrina,
- Advocate for effective public policies to bring home and rebuild the lives of all low-income people in New Orleans and Jefferson Parish, and
- Work to prevent new homelessness as we rebuild our community.

1) Guarantee the Right of Return

All residents of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish must be guaranteed the right to return to their community, regardless of their socio-economic status, race, disability or age. UNITY calls on each government -- local, state and federal -- to take all necessary steps to ensure that all people have the means to return, through 1) the provision of outreach and ongoing contact with all displaced persons and 2) the provision of transportation and financial assistance to bring everyone home unless they desire to permanently relocate elsewhere. Special attention must be paid to ensure that all poor people, the elderly and disabled have transportation with which to return. Displaced people must receive fair treatment, including equal access to public education and other government services in the communities to which they have been dispersed.

2) Develop an Adequate Supply of Affordable and Permanent Supportive Housing

- UNITY, other non-profit organizations, the federal, state and local governments should form a partnership to develop an adequate supply of Permanent Supportive Housing for disabled persons and affordable housing for all low-income people.
- All new housing developments in New Orleans and Jefferson Parish must include a set-aside of units for low-income families and individuals.
- The Housing Authorities for New Orleans and Jefferson Parish should immediately reopen all public housing units that are habitable and repair those that are not and participate in all subsidized housing programs including the Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program. All funds for Section 8 should be released and an expanded voucher program should be established.

- A temporary moratorium should be placed on rental increases in order to ensure affordable housing that is essential to rebuilding our economy and that will enable low-income people to return to the community.
- All branches of government should make available, and should exhort the private sector to make available, all possible sources of temporary affordable housing in the region, including FEMA trailers, space on which to locate trailers, prefab housing, and dormitories.

3) Develop a Responsive and Effective Social Infrastructure

A responsive and effective social infrastructure must be developed for New Orleans and Jefferson Parish, including excellent public education, expanded regional public transportation including a light rail system, and accessible, high-quality physical and mental health care. This infrastructure is essential to encouraging residents of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish to return home, to lifting individuals and families from poverty, and to preventing homelessness in the rebuilt community.

4) Assure Local Workers Are Given Well-Paid Jobs to Rebuild Our Community

Seventy-five percent of reconstruction work must be done by regional businesses with local employees. Employees must receive needed training for jobs that pay livable wages, and small businesses must have immediate access to capital and support services.

5) Insist on Public Accountability, Democracy, and Inclusion of Poor People and Other Vulnerable Populations in Decision-Making

Public accountability, democracy, and inclusion of poor people and other vulnerable populations must be the hallmark of all decision-making regarding the rebuilding of our community. The composition of all planning and decision-making groups should reflect the demographic make-up of the community. All meetings and planning processes should be well-publicized in ways calculated to reach low-income persons and the general public. All meetings and planning processes should be accessible to vulnerable populations and structured to ensure wide public participation, especially of poor people, other vulnerable populations, and non-profit organizations that work in the public interest.

6) Create a Fund to Meet the Needs of Low-Income Katrina Victims and Non-Profit Social Services Organizations

Like the Florida Hurricane Relief Fund set up in 2004, Louisiana's fund should seek to fill the gaps in assistance provided by FEMA and the Red Cross and should make grants directly to non-profits in New Orleans, Jefferson Parish and other parts of Louisiana in order to distribute the funds to needy persons.

7) Assure the Safety of All New Orleanians From Another Hurricane

- Federal and state governments must rebuild our region's levees higher and stronger to withstand a Category 5 hurricane and must replenish Louisiana's wetlands.
- Local and state government, with support from federal government, must take responsibility for evacuating all people from the city prior to a hurricane of Category 3 and above, by all means necessary – bus, train, boat, airplane, national guard -- so that no vulnerable persons – low-

income, disabled, elderly, or those without private transportation -- will ever again lose their lives because they had no way to get out or did not understand that their lives were in danger.

- Local and state government, with support from federal government, must engage in an effective public relations campaign well in advance of hurricane seasons to educate the public, especially vulnerable populations, that hurricanes of Category 3 and above endanger their lives, the necessity to evacuate, and how to obtain evacuation assistance.

8) Assist the Families and Friends of Those Who are Missing or Who Lost Their Lives

Local, state and federal government must commit immediate adequate resources to locate all missing and dead persons, identify the dead, issue death certificates, release bodies for burial, and communicate with and be responsive to the needs of the families and friends of persons who are missing or who lost their lives in Katrina. Those who lost their lives to Hurricane Katrina must never be forgotten. Our community must pay its respects to and create memorials honoring our many neighbors who died -- each of whom has made a unique and significant contribution to our community.