



Washington State Coalition for the Homeless
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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1998

STATE SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

On Christmas Eve day 1997 the Washington State Supreme Court issued a decision that upheld the decision of the lower court in a case that has become known as the "Homeless Children's Lawsuit" since it was filed in 1991. The State Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case in October 1996.

The Court ruled:

- DSHS has a legal duty to devise and implement a "coordinated and comprehensive plan" for the protection and care of the state's homeless children and affirmed the trial court's findings that DSHS had failed to fulfill this duty.
- Dependency court judges have the authority to order DSHS to provide its CPS/CWS caseworkers with housing assistance for use on behalf of families when homelessness is the primary reason causing or prolonging a child's need for foster care.

There is now in place an "Agreed Scheduling Order" in the case. The order gives DSHS until September 1 to submit a plan to the court. We have until October 1 to comment on the plan. The final version of the plan is due to the court five weeks after the end of the 1999 Legislative Session.

A subcommittee of the State Advisory Council on Homelessness, with members from several state agencies and homeless service providers, is working to develop the plan required by the Court.

Columbia Legal Services
625 Commerce St, Suite 430 98402
For further information about the lawsuit, contact Michael Mirra, 253/572-4343.

1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION YIELDS ONLY A LITTLE FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE AND HOUSING

The best news from the 1998 Session was that we preserved the statute on which the Homeless Children's lawsuit is based. At the opening of the session there was danger that it would be changed in order to negate the lawsuit. Thanks to the work of many advocates educating legislators and legislative leaders, as well as good press coverage, that did not happen.

Here are some other successes during the 1998 Legislative Session:

- House Bill (HB) 2598 indefinitely extended the property tax exemption on shelters for homeless people.
- SB 5622 indefinitely extended the sales tax exemption on construction materials for youth shelters.
- SB 6380 increases the amount mobile home owners can get for relocation expenses.
- \$120,000 was included in the supplemental budget for the six licensed youth shelters in the state.

A bill strongly opposed by housing advocates which would have pre-empted local landlord/tenant laws was vetoed by Governor Locke.

We participated in two well-attended lobby days during the legislative session. We co-sponsored Housing Lobby Day with the Washington Low Income Housing Congress and the Children's Alliance. Over 60 people, mostly youth, attended the Homeless Youth Task Force lobby day, "Housing Works." Many participants in both lobby days were able to talk personally with legislators. That was a particularly meaningful part of the youth lobby day.

Many thanks to all who participated in our advocacy efforts by coming to a lobby day, testifying before a legislative committee, and/or talking with, calling or writing to legislators. Our lobbyist, Johanne Hellman, and the other human service lobbyists are excellent, but their efforts are much more effective when combined with action from the grassroots—voters.

STATE COALITION WORKGROUP FORMED TO DESIGN STATEWIDE SHELTER DENIAL/DISCHARGE PROCEDURES

In response to concerns from the Homelessness Task Force of Columbia Legal Services about problematic shelter denial and eviction practices in our state, the State Coalition has organized a workgroup to develop a statewide appeals process for shelter denial and discharge. The workgroup is designing agreed-upon procedures, not legal standards. We want this work to support the good work that shelters are already doing. Fair process, clear communication and documentation will be important. One of the challenges will be to design procedures that are adaptable to specific communities and programs (i.e. procedures in 30-day family shelters will likely be different than overnight shelters for single people).

The workgroup involves people from all different kinds of programs and from various geographic areas. We are seeking information from programs across the state. We are particularly interested in having sent to us: 1) Written shelter admission/discharge policies; 2) Shelter turnaway practices; 3) Shelter denial/discharge policies and procedures; and 4) Existing appeal processes in use by shelters. The workgroup would

appreciate your sending these materials to the Coalition office at PO Box 955, Tacoma, WA 98401-0955.

For more information contact Scott Pinegar, Chair of the Workgroup at 206/320-2172.

STATE COALITION UPDATE

New in the Coalition library: (Call 253/572-4237 to check them out. No charge, but you pay return postage.)

- *I Have Arrived Before My Words: Autobiographical Writings of Homeless Women.* Published by Charles River Press.
- *How to Tell Your Story: A Guide to Media for Community Groups and other Nonprofits.* Published by Shelterforce magazine.
- *Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being.* Published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- *State of Homelessness Report.* Published by the City of Toronto.
- *Conversations with 65 Families: A look at the impacts of federal devolution and welfare reform on Seattle families.* Published by the City of Seattle (March 1998).

Calendar:

- May 4 - Shelter Denial/Discharge Workgroup meeting. SeaTac. 206/320-2172
- May 8 - Conference Planning Committee meeting. Tacoma 360/425-8679.
- May 19 - Homeless Youth Task Force committee meetings. Seattle. 206/694-4508 ext. 1213.
- June 16 - Homeless Youth Task Force semi-annual meeting. Seattle. 206/694-4508 ext. 1213,
- July 13 - Board meeting. Place TBA. 253/572-4237
- May 6-8,1999 (tent.) Ninth Annual Statewide Conference. Yakima. 253/572-4237

Committee work: The Public Education Committee continues to work on updating and improving the Coalition's photo exhibit "The Faces of Homelessness." The Legislative Committee will be planning the Coalition's part in "Housing Our Community," the joint housing campaign for the 1999 Legislative Session. Interested individuals are welcome to participate in this work. Public Education Chair is Bob Peeler (509/456-7106 ext. 106) and Legislative Chair is Corky Senecal (360/377-0053 ext.334).

Homeless Youth brochure: The Public Education Committee of the Homeless Youth Task Force has designed and published an excellent brochure about homeless youth. For a copy please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to WSCH, PO Box 955, Tacoma, WA 98401-0955.

Quotable quote: Poverty is both the obvious and the documented primary factor in homelessness. A homeless person once said: "Housing is a very crucial part of poverty, but it is not all of it. It's impossible to deal with one aspect of poverty." The other faces of poverty—unemployment, underemployment, malnutrition, inadequate incomes, an increased gap between rich and poor, and insufficient access to health and child care, education and training—are part of the cause of homelessness and part of the effect of homelessness on the individual. (From *State of Homelessness Report*. See above.)

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