Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO)

2009-2010 Hypothermia Comments

To: Neil O. Albert, City Administrator
Clarence H. Carter, Director, DHS
Laura G. Zeilinger, Deputy Director, DHS
Patricia Handy, Homelessness Services, DHS
Chapman Todd, Chair, Operations & Logistics Committee,
DC Interagency Council on Homelessness
Councilmember Tommy Wells, Chair, Committee on Human Services

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Housing and Homeless Organizations (COHHO). COHHO is a diverse group of non-profit organizations and individuals in the District of Columbia who have a common goal of ending homelessness.

COHHO has been at the forefront of gathering data and monitoring information about cold and heat alerts during hypothermia and hyperthermia seasons. Exposure to extreme cold or extreme heat can result in death, and for homeless persons the risk of exposure to such extreme temperatures is a daily reality. For this reason, COHHO and its members have developed a system for tracking the daily weather conditions, the alert status, the nightly census in the homeless shelters, the open status of all the emergency shelters contracted in the District of Columbia's Continuum of Care, including hypothermia shelters, and the identities of those shelters that were at or over capacity on a given night.

The information for the 2009-2010 Hypothermia Season (November 1, 2009 – March 31, 2010) can be found in the attached Hypothermia Chart. The Chart begins in mid-October, 2009, because an alert was called on October 18.² There are several sets of data incorporated into this Hypothermia Chart.

¹¹ COHHO or its member organizations have reported on Hypothermia for more than seven years. COHHO's reports are intended to amplify, not replace, reports prepared by or for The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness.

² There are 151 days between Nov. 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010, inclusive. The total number of days recorded in this year's Chart, however, is 166, commencing with Oct. 17, 2009.

The weather data in the Hypothermia Chart is taken from the National Weather Service's Official Weather Data for Washington, DC. It is the actual data recorded each day. An alert is required by the Homeless Services Reform Act when the actual or forecasted temperature or wind chill will be 32° Fahrenheit or below. Thus, we measure when an alert should have been called based on actual readings. It is possible that more alerts should have been called based on forecasts.

Once an alert is called during the Hypothermia Season, it is required that the hypothermia shelters open and United Planning Organization (UPO) vans pick up homeless persons from the streets and take them to shelters. The Hypothermia Chart indicates when the hypothermia shelters were open, and when other emergency shelters were open or closed.

The Chart tracks daily census data for the emergency shelters according to men, women, family groups, and number of family members. The Chart indicates those days on which the system as a whole was at or over capacity for Men, Women, or Families. The Chart also indicates which shelters were over capacity on any night, and by how many individuals or families. A key to the Chart follows this narrative.

DEATHS

There have been persistent unofficial reports concerning five or six suspected hypothermic deaths on the streets of the District during this Hypothermia Season. The Office of the Medical Examiner has apparently determined that at least three of these deaths were homeless persons. However, the Office of the Medical Examiner has been unwilling to release any information about these deaths to the public, not even the dates of the deaths. COHHO would appreciate the release of even minimal information so that policymakers and medical professionals could examine each death in the context of other events on the date of death, with emphasis on the weather conditions.

ALERTS

Alerts were called on 104 days during the 2009-2010 Hypothermia Season (November 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010), plus the alert on October 18. Based on actual data, COHHO found that alerts should have been called on five additional days³ when the statutory standards were satisfied (on one of these days, 3/1, hypothermia beds were nonetheless open, at least at night). This contrasts with 112 alerts called last year and seven days on which alerts were missed according to COHHO's data.

³ Those dates were 12/1, 3/1, 3/6, 3/7, and 3/8. 12/14 appears from the Chart to be another 'missed 'alert, but we understand that on that date the alert was called off at 3pm and the alert was called again late afternoon on 12/15. If the below 32° situation was in the early morning of 12/14 and the temperature and wind chill stayed above 32° until after midnight on 12/15, the alerts were correctly called on those dates.

In general, the timing of the calling of alerts was appropriate. However, it is troubling that the three alerts in November were called at 3:00 AM. On these nights, DHS insists that two seasonal shelters (one each for Men and Women) were opened (seasonal shelters were not yet open at the time), but this is not reflected in the daily census for those days. Hypothermia shelters were not opened on those three days.

CAPACITY

Winter Plan

The 2009-2010 Winter Plan called for 166 more beds for men than last year, 15 fewer for women, and 18 more units for families. The 2009-2010 Plan called for:

- 1566 beds for men in emergency shelters, including 980 in year-round shelters, 261 seasonal beds, and 325 in hypothermia shelters;
- 495 beds for women, including 352 in year-round shelters, 48 in seasonal beds, and 95 in hypothermia shelters; and
- facilities for 288 family groups, 128 in year-round shelters and 100 in seasonal facilities at DC General.

Maximum Served System-wide in Winter 2009-2010

The maximum number of clients served on one night this year was **2824**. The number was above 2700 for 27 days. The maximum last year was 2543.

Men

According to the daily census of beds available and filled each night, during the 2009-2010 Hypothermia Season, when all beds, including hypothermia beds, were open, there were 1386 beds available for men. In addition, an indeterminate number were available in the overflow shelter, but that was only open 14 nights during the Season. The maximum number of men served on one night was 1383.

Although overall capacity was not exceeded on any hypothermia (alert) night, two individual shelters were frequently over capacity by as many as 25. Other individual shelters were occasionally over capacity. This pattern points out that the shelters are not necessarily where the homeless men are located, and it is documented that some clients refuse transportation to out-of-the-way shelters. This situation should be addressed.

⁴ On none of these three nights was an alert required according to the actual data reported; however, each night the wind chill was 33° and the forecast could have been for 32° or colder. By the same token, the alerts called on 12/26 and 1/17 were not required by the actual data reported for those days; however, each day had major precipitation which may have triggered the calling of the alert. DHS is to be commended for calling alerts in such circumstances.

On 11 **non-alert** nights, when the hypothermia beds were not open, the men's system was at or over capacity, once by as many as 23. This also occurred on 3 nights in October. The overflow shelter was not open on any non-alert night.

Women

According to the daily census of beds available and filled each night, on hypothermic (alert) nights, there were 470 beds available. The maximum number of women served on a hypothermia night was 444.

On **non-alert** nights, women were frequently at or over capacity. Before the 48 seasonal beds opened, women were at or over capacity on 17 of 34 days, as well as on 10 of the 15 days reported in October on the Chart. Likewise, on 17 of 23 non-alert days after the seasonal beds were opened, women were at or over capacity. This raises the serious question whether there are enough year-round beds for women.

Families

Even though capacity was periodically increased from 75 to 135 family groups at DC General, family units exceeded applicable capacity beginning on January 4 and extending through March 12, ultimately reaching 64 family units over capacity. This led to horrendous overcrowding and multiple families sharing rooms or public areas. The overcrowding was eventually eased by placement of over 70 families in transitional or permanent supportive housing.

However, at the end of the Hypothermia Season the number of family units served remained well above the 228 provided for in the Winter Plan. Obviously, the seasonal facilities at DC General cannot be shut down until housing for 120 families or more is found.

The situation with families is severe, as capacity in shelters fills up as soon as it is made available. It calls for significantly more housing over a long term.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melvin Watkins COHHO Chair

Approved by COHHO May 13, 2010.

INTRODUCTION TO COHHO HYPOTHERMIA 2009-2010 CHART

The Chart records for each day the following information:

the High and Low temperature,
the Humidity, Precipitation, and Wind Chill;
whether an Alert was called;
whether the hypothermia shelters were open and any exceptions;
the Total Number of clients served;
total Men; total Women; total Family Units; and total Persons in Families;
whether the system as a whole was at (letter) or over (letter and number) Capacity
for Men, Women or Families;
by how much any individual shelter was overcapacity (SOC);
followed by Notes.

The column on Capacity also shows the days that the overflow shelter for Men (V) was open and how many clients were served there that night. The overflow shelter for Women did not open during this season.

The shelters and their identifying initials are shown in the table below.

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SHELTERS

MEN 801 East Adams Place CCNV Drop-In Center CCNV 3-South La Casa New York Avenue Banneker Recreation Center	YR 380 150 90 360	52 30 135 44	HYPO 40	SYM E A D N L None B	Opened 1/20
Sacred Heart Church			50	S	
St. Luke's Church			30	U	
First United Methodist Church	h		25	Y	Opened 12/16
La Casa Overflow		((none spe	cified) V	Open only when noted
WOMEN					
CCNV 2-South		48		Z	
Harriet Tubman	100			T	
Hermano Pedro	20			P	
John Young	85			J	
Madison (House of Ruth)	39			None	
Open Door 12 Hour	108			R	
Community of Christ			25	X	
Hermano Pedro Hypothermia	L		5	H	
New Covenant Church			30	K	
Open Door Hypothermia			10	None	
FAMILY					
Congregation Based Shelter	7			None	
Girard Street	20			None	
Park Road	45			None	
Spring Road	28			None	
Naylor Road	28			None	
DC General		75-135		G	Increased in stages as noted



11/21/2009	11/19/2009	11/18/2009	11/17/2009	11/16/2009	11/15/2009	11/14/2009	11/13/2009	11/12/2009	11/11/2009	11/10/2009	11/9/2009	11/8/2009	11/7/2009	11/6/2009	11/5/2009	11/4/2009	11/3/2009	11/2/2009	11/1/2009	10/31/2009	10/30/2009	10/29/2009	10/28/2009	10/27/2009	10/26/2009	10/25/2009	10/24/2009	10/23/2009	10/22/2009	10/21/2009	10/20/2009	10/19/2009	10/18/2009	10/17/2009	
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933	995	979	994	990	937	927	947	962	977	980	945	939	944	933	982	980	952	945	959	893	895	983	976	980	979	966	922	915	975	978	977	978	980	962	Men W
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