

Delaware State Housing Authority
Making the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness Permanent (SB310)
NCSHA 2009 Legislative Campaign Award Nomination

Summary:

On July 21, 2008, Governor Ruth Ann Minner signed Senate Bill 310, establishing the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness (DICH) into state law. It was the culmination of nearly a year of advocacy work that resulted in unanimous bi-partisan and bi-cameral support for the bill. This entry highlights the efforts made by the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA) and its partners to gain support for SB 310.

The Council was first established by the Governor's Executive Order Number 65 on March 8, 2005. Since then, the DICH has created its Plan, "Breaking the Cycle: Delaware's Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and Reduce Long-Term Homelessness." The Plan was submitted to the Governor in February 2007.

The Ten-Year Plan lays the framework for ending chronic homelessness. Integral to meeting this goal is diligent oversight of the Plan implementation, continued assessment of needs, periodic measurement of success in meeting specific outcomes, and reporting on progress. Specifically, the Plan charges the DICH with serving as the government liaison and lead entity for oversight of the Plan's implementation. The DICH is responsible for developing annual objectives and identifying funding resources. It will also present quarterly and annual reports to the Governor on the progress being made toward achieving the goals stated in the Plan.

By making the DICH permanent in state law, Senate Bill 310 ensures the extension of the Ten-Year Plan into the next administration. Without the legislation, Delaware's progress in ending chronic homelessness, as well as the continuation of associated funding and program enhancements, would be subject to change by the incoming administration.

Advanced the Overall Mission of DSHA:

The mission of DSHA is to efficiently provide, and assist others to provide, quality, affordable housing opportunities and appropriate supportive services to responsible low- and moderate-income Delawareans. The agency is widely regarded as a strong advocate in the legislature for all issues affecting affordable housing in Delaware and is a driving force behind the work of the DICH. DSHA's Director was the sitting chair during this legislative session and DSHA provides all of the staff support for the DICH operations.

Demonstrated Coalition Building:

In the fall of 2007, DSHA took the lead in advocating for SB 310 by including the issue in its annual policy memo to Governor Ruth Ann Minner. In response, the governor gave her full support for the legislation, encouraging DSHA to pursue its passage.

DSHA staff drafted the language for the bill and set in motion the legislative campaign. The members of the DICH were all involved in the advocacy efforts that led to the successful passage of the legislation. DICH members include state agencies, local governments and other homeless services and advocacy groups including:

- Department of Health and Social Services

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- Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families
- Department of Labor
- Department of Education
- Department of Correction
- County Executive of New Castle County
- Kent County Administrator
- Sussex County Administrator
- Mayor of the City of Wilmington
- Mayor of the City of Dover
- Homeless service providers
- Homeless Planning Council
- Delaware Apartment Association
- State Council for Persons with Disabilities
- Council on Public Health
- Criminal Justice Council

Utilized Innovative Lobbying and Public Relations Techniques:

By approaching organizations outside the usual housing advocate community to build support for this bill, DSHA and its partners were able to take advantage of additional personal relationships with legislators. Delaware is widely considered to have the most approachable general assembly in the nation. It is not uncommon to find yourself in the cafeteria line behind the House Majority Leader. In this atmosphere, personal relationships with legislators are very important. Each member of the coalition supporting this bill was able to approach legislators with whom they shared existing relationships and make a case to gain their support.

Forged Effective Relationships with State Legislators:

The lobbying techniques employed by coalition members resulted in the Bill being sponsored by 13 legislators. The primary sponsors of the legislation have become more involved in affordable housing issues and, specifically, in their roles as appointees on the DICH.

Achieved Goals:

The bill passed unanimously in both the State House of Representatives and the State Senate. The Governor held a signing ceremony in her Dover, DE office. (Please see attached photos.) While not a rare event, the signing ceremony indicates the advocacy efforts for the bill created a wide and large base of support.

Anticipated, Identified and Prioritized Legislative Issues. Employed Analytical Skill to Anticipate and Identify the Potential Ramifications of the Issues:

A personalized memo, containing a fact sheet and asking for their vote, was sent from the Director of the Housing Authority to each member of the legislature prior to each committee and full chamber vote. (Please see attached fact sheet and memo).

Used Cost-effective Measures:

Other than staff time and minor office materials, there were no additional costs incurred with this legislative campaign.

Attachment No. 1: Fact Sheet (Distributed to Legislators Prior to Vote)

Support Senate Bill 310

Creating a Permanent Delaware Interagency

Council on Homelessness (DICH)

Senate Bill 310 creates the Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness (DICH) in state code.

- DICH currently exists through the Governor's Executive Order # 65.
- DICH released the 10-year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and Reduce Long-Term Homelessness in February 2007.

Support from the Community.

- Members of the DICH have reviewed and voted to support the bill.
- The Homeless Planning Council of Delaware supports the bill.

Why is this bill so important?

- Nearly 2,000 people are homeless each night in the state of Delaware – nearly 300 of them are chronically homeless.
- Nearly 7,000 people experience homelessness at least once in any given year in Delaware.
- Federal funding is tied to each state having a coordinated approach to planning and implementation of homeless assistance programs.
- Need to continue the work begun under the authority of the Executive Order.
- DSHA currently provides the administrative support for the DICH and will continue to do so – no fiscal note required.

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Attachment No. 2 – Memo Sent to Legislators Asking for Support of Legislation

June 18, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Senate Sunset Committee

FROM: Saundra R. Johnson

SUBJECT: **Senate Bill 310**

Attached to this page, please find a copy of SB 310. This bill will create in state code a permanent Delaware Interagency Council on Homelessness (DICH). The DICH currently exists by the Governor's Executive Order #65. We must continue the great work begun by the Council and ensure that this it remains in place to implement the 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness.

Senate Bill 310 has great support from the members of the DICH and other organizations that provide services to homeless people – including the Homeless Planning Council. A fact sheet describing in more detail the need and goals of this bill is also attached for your convenience.

Your support of Senate Bill 310 is greatly appreciated. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or Matthew Heckles, at (302) 739-4263, or via e-mail at matthew@destatehousing.com.

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Attachment No. 3 – Photos of Bill Signing Ceremony, July 2008

