

Robin is about to turn 55 years old. He has struggled with emphysema and asthma and has been hospitalized several times in the last year due to his severe health issues and lack of health insurance. He completed high school and some college and has a close family member who has stuck with him through his two year struggle, but things finally changed for him in March of 2012 due to a collaborative community effort called Rx: Housing. Rx: Housing is led by Family Health Centers' Phoenix Health Center and partners include Louisville Metro Housing Authority, Wellspring, Bridgehaven and JADAC. This group helped Robin get his own apartment after years of living on the streets.

Robin's story illuminates the need for supportive housing in Kentucky and across the nation. Supportive housing is affordable housing that is combined with supportive services residents can use to get back on their feet. Services include everything from case management to job training to drug and alcohol treatment. A wealth of research demonstrates that supportive housing is not only a very effective housing solution for people with complex challenges, but is also more cost-effective than the alternatives (which sadly often include emergency rooms, mental hospitals or incarceration).

Today there are serious threats to federal funding that could undermine the good work backing supportive housing in communities across Kentucky. The federal budget mechanism known as sequestration is set to be triggered in January unless Congress acts swiftly to reverse it. Sequestration, which threatens to cut 8.4% in funding for nearly every federal housing program and many other social service programs, is the result of a 2011 Congressional impasse over the budget deficit. Because legislators couldn't agree on how to address the deficit, they chose the blunt instrument of across-the-board cuts to programs—including those that serve the most vulnerable among us.

What would that mean in actual lives impacted? According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, an estimated 145,906 people nationwide would be at risk of being homeless because of a nearly \$160 million cut in McKinney-Vento homeless assistance grants. Additionally, almost a \$1.6 billion cut in the Section 8 Program could result in an estimated 186,915 fewer vouchers for the program, putting those people at risk of becoming homeless as well. As shown above the results of sequestration could be very harmful to programs we hold dear on a national level, the local picture is also very troubling. If sequestration goes through, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities estimates the following impact in Kentucky: An estimated 2,618 families cut from Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), an estimated \$7,272,677 in cuts to Public Housing funding, an estimated \$1,748,719 in cuts to Homeless Assistance programs, and cuts to other vital programs.

That's why it is crucial that Members of Congress address how they'll solve the impending funding crisis under sequestration. They must assure voters that they'll work across the aisle to find a balanced solution that protects programs like McKinney-Vento, Section 8 and

others that fund supportive housing. The well-being of thousands of vulnerable residents of Kentucky is on the line.

As Robin said, “I finally have a place to call home so that I can change my life.” Supportive housing paved the way for Robin to move from a life on the street. We need to protect the funding streams that help Robin and countless others across Kentucky who can live with stability, health and hope thanks to supportive housing.

Natalie Harris
Executive Director
The Coalition for the Homeless, Inc.