On November 27, 1858, the Memphis newspaper *The Commercial Appeal* ran an article stating that twenty-four homeless persons were expelled from the city, though many of them were noticeably ill. ¹ Now, 152 years later, Memphis still has no effective plan for aiding these destitute individuals except to push them out of the city. While this mass migration away from the downtown area has not yet commenced, new legislation passed in 2010 definitely aims at achieving this goal. *The Memphis Flyer* reports; “Tuesday morning, the Memphis City Council’s public safety committee passed a pair of CCC-proposed ordinances aimed at curbing panhandling.”² Further on the article describes the ordinances, which ban what is deemed “aggressive” panhandling and the sale of single beers in the downtown area.³ News of the legislation was deemed noteworthy as far away as Knoxville, Tennessee, who’s *Knoxville News Sentinel* published an article titled “Memphis getting tough on panhandling; City says problem is


3 Ibid.
out of control, scares off business, tourists." How did the city arrive at such a troubling crossroads with reference to the homeless, when less than twenty years earlier innovative policies by the Clinton administration funneled millions in grant money to the city specifically for assistance to homelessness charities? Examining the comprehensive homelessness program established during the Clinton administration, the difficulty of the federal government to sufficiently fund these programs throughout Clinton’s term of office, and the ultimate mismanagement of substantial Federal funds received by the Memphis government answers the question of why the city is in such a stagnant state with regards to homeless assistance.

Initially, there was a substantial homeless problem at the beginning of the Clinton administration, though there existed some discrepancy on exactly who should be included in a tally of homeless individuals. Accordingly, based on data collected on two different occasions


5 Quantifying the population that the Clinton administration was targeting is essential. Without a definition of what exactly counts as a homeless individual it is difficult to measure the effects of the Clinton administration’s work, because without a clearly defined meaning of homeless there is no way to estimate the magnitude of the homeless population. However, pinpointing a definition is likewise a cumbersome process because there are many separate types of homeless individuals. Persons can be chronically homeless, transitinally homeless, or what many call the “hidden homeless”. A chronically homeless person is one with a debilitating condition who has experienced continuous homelessness for at least one year, or one who has had at least four stents without a home in three years. The “hidden homeless” however can be a person in a myriad of situations, couch-surfing but never at the same residence for long or residing in parked cars or tents. Noting this information, the 1986 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, a Reagan era document which established all Federal assistance for the homeless at that time, was revisited and renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1992. During this revision a working definition of homeless was established which included persons who were not literally without housing each night. The Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] states:

Federal Definition of Homelessness:
For purposes of this chapter, the term “homeless” or “homeless individual or homeless person” includes:
1. an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
   A. a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
   B. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized or
   C. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. 
in 1996, some 444,000 persons experienced homelessness on a given night in October, while 842,000 experienced homelessness on a given night in February. When converted into an annual estimate, these studies project that upwards of 3.5 million people lived on the streets at some point in the year 1996.\(^6\) Organizations still stressed that these numbers were inexact, and while minor discrepancies possibly existed, it was impossible to deny that during the Clinton administration’s term of office there was a serious homeless problem that the government needed to address.\(^7\) Clinton’s homeless policy, the programs and funding that the Administration provided, evidenced itself as a concerned response.

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\(^{(c)}\) Exclusion
For purposes of this chapter, the term “homeless” or “homeless individual” does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of the Congress or a State law. ("Federal Definition of Homeless," United States Code, Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter1, http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/homelessness/definition.) Though this definition is still in use today, it severely complicates attempts to calculate the exact number of homeless persons residing in the United States because of its less than precise language.


\(^7\) Much of this complication stems from the methodology used to gather the data. There are several ways to approach this task, though the primary methods are point-in-time-counts and period prevalence counts. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, a non-profit organization focused on lobbying for homelessness aid, this difference in methods of calculation is a serious issue. In the recent article, “How Many People Experience Homelessness,” the organization asserts; “Choosing between point-in-time counts and period-prevalence counts has significant implications for understanding the magnitude and dynamics of homelessness.” (National Coalition for the Homeless, “How Many People Experience Homelessness?” http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html.) They base this claim on the fact that many people who experience homelessness are transient, and do not remain homeless for long. As a result of this fact, the methodology is important because with the point-in-time count experts run the risk of overestimating the number of chronically homeless.\(^7\) In a point-in-time count an estimate is compiled of how many persons are either literally homeless or residing in shelters on any given night. Groups like the Urban Institute, the National Alliance Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers, in conjunction with local area non-profits across America, accomplish this sort of study by scouring the streets and shelters of major cities all across the country and literally counting those persons that they find. However, the data produced by these studies is often criticized because it does not take into consideration all of the hidden spaces – or cat holes – where a great deal of the U.S. homeless population resides. A period-prevalence count on the other hand, measures the number of homeless persons on a yearly basis by conducting several point-in-time studies and then creating projections based on that data. Many organizations prefer this methodology because they believe that it provides a more accurate approximation of how many people are homeless in the United States. Though this number is a helpful reference tool, the National Coalition for the Homeless concludes their article by declaring, “By
As Clinton entered office, the situation of the homeless was one of dire importance to the American people; therefore the Administration addressed it promptly. During Clinton’s campaigning, the issue of homeless assistance became a definite point of contention between the Democrats and the Republicans; the more liberal Democratic Party even went so far as labeling George H.W. Bush’s tenure as President a “decade of neglect” in terms of homeless assistance. Therefore, the President’s first legislation in relation to the homeless problem was his issuance of Executive Order 12848, in May of 1993, which he titled “Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness.” Furthermore, in a memorandum for Leon Panetta, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Henry G. Cisneros stated; “The Interagency Council on the Homeless will have its first meeting of Clinton Administration cabinet-level members on May 19, 1993. This meeting will mark a new direction in Federal homeless policy.” Cisneros, the Secretary of

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the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], was correct; the meeting was to discuss the President’s impending Executive Order which eventually revolutionized homeless assistance. The Order itself contained five sections. Section one instructed the Interagency Council on the Homeless to, “…develop a single coordinated Federal plan for breaking the cycle of existing homelessness and for preventing future homelessness.” In Section 2, the President stated that the plan submitted to him should propose a schedule for implementing administrative initiatives and for recommending legislative proposals to Congress; “These initiatives and legislative proposals shall identify ways to streamline and consolidate, when appropriate, existing programs designed to assist homeless individuals and families.” The third Section of the Order assigned the plan to recommend new directions for existing funding programs in aims to connect all encompassing entities related to homeless assistance. By attempting to coordinate and connect these recipients of Federal funding, the Plan ultimately created the framework for the Continuum of Care model that the Department of Housing and Urban Development drafted later the same year. Section four of the Order instructed the Council to consult all the necessary bodies that would be ultimately affected by the plan in order to create a program that addressed their needs and interests according to local prescriptions, and the final Section designated that the plan should be submitted back to the President by February of 1994. This Executive Order exhibited the President’s desire to create a comprehensive and coordinated


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.
effort at eliminating homelessness in the United States; furthermore, this document set the groundwork for all of the homeless assistance measures of the Administration for the next seven years.

Soon after the issuance of the Executive Order a problem arouse concerning the funding for the Interagency Council on the Homeless, the body appointed to conduct the studies for this proposed Federal plan. In the proposed budget for the 1994 fiscal year the Council lost their appropriation of separate funds. Once informed of the decision to discontinue these funds, Henry Gonzalez wrote a letter to President Clinton on October 28, 1993, urging him not to discontinue the funds.16 On November 11, 1993, Joseph Firschein in the Office of Legislative Affairs noted in his reply to the letter from Representative Henry Gonzalez of the Council that the work done by the Interagency Council on the Homeless was a great asset that should not to be lost. He stated:

In light of the elimination of separate FY 1994 appropriation for the Council, White House staff have been working closely with the Council to develop a means of continuing Federal coordination of homelessness issues. To achieve this goal, the Interagency Council, under its current leadership, will become a working group of the Domestic Policy Council and will be staffed and funded by HUD...Again, thank you for your letter, and your support in the fight to end the national tragedy of homelessness. I expect that an announcement will be made in the immediate future.17

16 Henry B. Gonzalez, Chairman Committee on Banking and Finance, letter to The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton, page 1-2, folder “Homelessness Info ’92 and ’93” [OA 5859], Box 14 OA 5859, Carol Rasco, Subject Files, Domestic Policy Council, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

17 Joseph Firschein letter to United States Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, page 1-2, folder “Homelessness Info ’92 & ’93” [OA 5859], Box 14 OA 5859, Carol Rasco, Subject File, Domestic Policy Council, Systematic Processed Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.
The next day Cisneros and Carol H. Rasco, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, issued a memo to the members of the Interagency Council confirming what Mr. Firschein addressed in his letter. They stated; “We are pleased to inform you, however, that because of President Clinton’s commitment … the Interagency Council will be a working group of the Domestic Policy Council and will be staffed and funded by HUD.”\(^\text{18}\) This announcement was well received by both the Interagency Council members and the National Alliance to End Homelessness, whose subsequent letter stated; “We are grateful that not only has the Council been saved, but it has been elevated to the White House Domestic Policy Council, under your direction.”\(^\text{19}\) The Domestic Policy Council led discussions on homelessness legislation for the President’s term of office. This consolidation of the branches of homelessness policy providers served as the Administration’s beginning actions towards establishing far more comprehensive efforts to address homelessness than their predecessors.

One immediate effect of the President’s Executive Order was the creation of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Continuum of Care model for homeless assistance. This model, which HUD publicized as, “Helping Homeless People Reach Self-Sufficiency,” revolutionized the way the Federal Government considered funding for homeless agencies.\(^\text{20}\) In the year 2000, HUD issued a pamphlet describing the Continuum of Care as a part of...
of Clinton’s History Project. The document describes the aims of the program by stating that it introduces three fundamentally new ways of responding to homelessness, “First, it redefines homelessness as more than simply a housing problem – and refocusses attention beyond ‘band-aid’ fixes to long-term solutions...Second, it encourages communities to develop a comprehensive plan...Third, it then awards ‘performance-based grants.’” The report also stated that a community employing a successful Continuum of Care addressed the needs of the homeless through outreach, emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing options. The intermingling of these separate branches of the aid process was invariably different from Clinton’s predecessors’ methods of aid. Prior to the Clinton administration, coordination and discourse were almost unheard of. This outgrowth of President Clinton’s Executive Order in May of 1993 would not be the most expansive creation by the order. With the help of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the finished product to arise from the Executive Order in 1994 was a more comprehensive model for homeless assistance.

Although the Continuum of Care was one creation of the President’s Executive Order, the Domestic Policy Council also compiled a comprehensive Review of Homeless Assistance that was used to facilitate discussion at a review of homeless policy implementation in December of

23846] [4], Box 32 OA 23861, Housing and Urban Development, Clinton Administration History Project, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

21 Ibid, 2.

22 Ibid, 2.

1994.\textsuperscript{24} Officially, the Domestic Policy Council stated their purpose for conducting this survey: “The purposes of this review are to explore options for: (1) possible changes in the existing structure of programs affecting the homeless; and (2) potential reallocation of resources across agencies.”\textsuperscript{25} Called the “Homeless Assistance Crosscut,” this document assessed all of the funding and works being done for the homeless at that time. Predominately discussed in this analysis were the programs funded under the 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, totaling 1.3 billion dollars in the 1994 fiscal year budget.\textsuperscript{26} Yet again, many of the same themes expressed in the President’s Executive Order were reiterated in this review; “The overall goals of Federal assistance are to break the cycle of existing homelessness and prevent future homelessness. To achieve these ambitious goals, it may be necessary to rethink the way we distribute funding…as well as to redesign these programs themselves.”\textsuperscript{27} Although the beginning of this statement seems like a verbatim quote from the Executive Order, a complete overhaul of homeless grant funding and programs had not been stated thus far in the homeless assistance conversation. In fact, the report stated earlier that many of the programs funded in 1993 were strictly continuances of 1987 legislation; “Most of the targeted homeless programs are part of the 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, which authorized a broad range

\textsuperscript{24} Carol Rasco and Leon E. Panetta memorandum for Secretaries Henry Cisneros, Donna Shalala, and Jessie Brown “Review of Homeless Assistance”, page 01, folder “Homelessness Info ‘92 & ‘93” [OA 5859], Box 14 OA 5859, Carol Rasco, Subject Files, Systematic Processed Collection, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{25} “Homeless Assistance Crosscut” December 13, 1995, page 01, folder “Homelessness Info ‘92 & ‘93” [OA 5859], Box 14 OA 5859, Carol Rasco, Subject Files, Systematic Processed Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 2.
of homeless assistance in several agencies.” While the review did not reach any conclusive
details about what the Administrations next steps should be, it did set the stage for the massive
restructuring of Federal homeless assistance to come during Clinton’s term of office.

Finally, The Federal Plan To Break The Cycle of Homelessness, Priority: Home! was
issued on March 8, 1994. This plan marked the Clinton Administration’s most emphatic
measure to date for addressing the problem of homelessness in the United States. A massive 108
page document, this plan not only diagnosed the state of U.S. homelessness, but it also attempted
to address recent failed efforts at alleviating the problem, as well as recommended new policy.

The plan’s authors defined the state of American homelessness in an attempt to assert that
this problem was no longer an aberration of society. They titled the section, “The Face of
Homelessness: No Longer a Poor Apart.” Using statistical data from a 1987 point-in-time
count, the plan estimated that as many as 600,000 people were homeless on any given night in
the United States. The authors eloquently stated:

To put it plainly, homelessness in the 1990s reveals as much about the unsolved social
and economic problems of the 1970s as it does about more recent developments…By the
middle of the 1980s, the number of homeless people had surpassed anything seen since
the Great Depression. Disability, disease, and even death were becoming regular features
of life on the streets and in shelters. For the first time, women and children were
occupying quarters formerly “reserved” for skid-row men. Psychiatric hospitals
continued to discharge people with little hope of finding, let alone managing, housing of
their own. Crack cocaine emerged as a drug of choice for those on the margins of

28 “Homeless Assistance Crosscut” December 13, 1995, page 01, folder “Homelessness Info ’92 & ’93” [OA 5859],
Box 14 OA 5859, Carol Rasco, Subject Files, Domestic Policy Council, Systematic Processed Collections, William J.
Clinton Presidential Library.

Council on Homelessness” [OA 7454] [1], Box 33 OA 7454, Carol Rasco, Subject Files, Domestic Policy Council,
Systematic Processed Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.
society. A new scourge –HIV/AIDS – joined and old one – tuberculosis – to become major afflictions of the homeless poor. Yet for all that, there remained something disconcertingly familiar about this new homelessness. What America glimpsed on the streets and in the shelters in the 1980’s was the usually hidden face of poverty, dislodged from its customary habitat.30

This section of the report did contain far more than flowery language though. Building upon the magnitude of those afflicted, the report also considered the demographics of this population finding that three quarters of the homeless population were single adults, with men outnumbering women by five.31 Most single homeless adults were in their mid-thirties, and the average age of homeless mothers was early thirties.32 Homelessness was further characterized demographically through discussions of institutional interactions as well as physical and mental health issues, stating: “Only one in four homeless men has no history of any institutional stay, whether it be hospitalization, jail or prison, or impatient chemical dependency treatment….At least half of the adult homeless population has a current or past alcohol or drug use problem.”33 But, the report did not simply perpetuate all of the stereotypical beliefs that the homeless are all drug addicted males. It also stated that families with children comprised a fifth of the homeless population in the States.34 However, once this overview of the United States homeless population was finished, the resounding message was that homelessness was a far larger problem than previously believed.

With such a daunting task facing the authors, they attempted to propose policy changes and new policies to benefit this bereft population. The report asserted that the main structural

31 Ibid, 18.
32 Ibid, 18.
33 Ibid, 19.
34 Ibid, 18.
causes of homelessness were poverty, a shift in the labor market from production of goods to services, dramatic lowering of income assistance from the federal government, a growing lack of affordable housing, a shift away from the nuclear family structure, and drugs, disabilities, and chronic health problems. Once established, the authors of the plan summarily condemned the past administrations for neglecting necessary funding as well as simply failing to collaborate with local and state efforts to address the issue. *Priority Home!* claimed that the list of unfinished measures for the Federal Government to address when considering the homeless problem included: alleviating a street homelessness problem that had achieved levels “not seen since the ‘Hoovervilles’ of the 1930s,” providing more adequate care for mentally ill homeless individuals, improving substance abuse centers, acknowledging that rural homelessness exists, lending credence to homeless veterans, aiding those at risk of homelessness, focusing on preventative measures, and finally instilling vigor and energy into a public weary of the homelessness issue.

After assessing all of these facts and figures, the authors addressed their ultimate policy decisions. According to the plan, the most frequent request from those polled was to simplify the McKinney Act assistance programs and streamline their funding. The new programs were designated to coincide with a Continuum of Care model:

First, there must be an emergency shelter/assessment effort which provides an immediate alternative to the street, and can identify an individual’s or family’s needs. The second component offers transitional or rehabilitative services for those who need them. Such services include substance abuse treatment, short-term mental health services, and independent living skills. Appropriate case management should be accessed to ensure that persons receiving necessary services, for example, that children attend school

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37 Ibid, 57.
regularly. The third and final component, and the one essential component for every homeless individual and family, is permanent housing or supportive housing arrangements.\textsuperscript{38}

Prior to this proclamation, the McKinney Act assistance programs provided more than twenty grant programs through six agencies.\textsuperscript{39} To many homeless agencies, this comprised a complex web of programs that were extremely difficult to navigate.\textsuperscript{40} Secondly, the plan proposed to double the McKinney grant money from the 1994 total of $823 million dollars to a proposed $1.7 billion dollars, with the overall homeless assistance budget climbing to $2.15 billion.\textsuperscript{41} This was an unprecedented allowance for homelessness funding, especially given the previous administrations lack of expenditures in the area. Thirdly, the plan stated, “Make Mental Health Services Work for the Poor,” and then further stated this point by saying, “The most visible and needy of the homeless population are the men and women with serious and persistent mental illness. They are among the most vulnerable and poorly served groups in our nation.”\textsuperscript{42}

Following the deinstitutionalization of the late 1980s this clear and apparent support for mental health aid was likewise unprecedented. Substance abuse services were targeted in the fourth aspect of the plan, and in the fifth a focus on those homeless persons living with HIV, AIDS and Tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{43} Finally, a boost in the earned income tax credit was proposed to help prevent those at risk of losing their homes from ending up on the streets. All of these points combined successfully completed all of the facets of what HUD claimed made up a Continuum of Care.

In a self summation, the authors of the plan wrote, “The new policy initiatives recommended in the plan grow out of a detailed analysis of the risk factors and structural causes

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 63.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 64.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 70.
of homelessness, as well as the most widespread survey ever of homeless providers, advocates and homeless individuals across the nations. These statements could not have been truer. There had never been such a concerted effort to evaluate the risk factors, causes, and possible solutions to homelessness in the U.S. However, some still balked that the administration was not bold enough in their demands for funding and projections for future programs. In a memorandum sent along with the final draft of the plan, the Executive Director for Economics and Government from the Office of Management and Budget, Christopher F. Edley, Jr. told Carol Rasco:

Some may criticize the Plan as not being bold enough because it does not call for new spending or major initiatives not already proposed. This is largely a function of its timing relative to the FY 1995 Budget process. As the Plan was being prepared, many of the key elements of the new approach, including a consolidation of HUD McKinney Act programs and increased funding for homeless programs and housing assistance to families, were presented and adopted as part of the President’s 1995 Budget.”

Regardless of the criticism from some parties, Edley Jr. summed up just what this Federal plan did accomplish when he stated, “In any case, the Plan lends enough credence to high estimates for us to accept credit for turning away from the practice in the Reagan-Bush years of denying that a serious problem exists.”


46 Ibid.
Prior to the *Priority: Home!* plan’s introduction to the public, the problems facing the Administration proved themselves formidable, as the General Accounting Office [GAO] issued a document displaying how the homeless problem was not going to be eliminated in one fell swoop. Their report entitled, *Homelessness: McKinney Act Programs Provide Assistance but Are Not Designed to Be the Solution* illustrated just how essential a retooling of the McKinney Programs was. The study focused on four major cities’ McKinney Act histories: Baltimore, Maryland; San Antonio, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and St. Louis, Missouri. 47 One section in particular provided a substantial blow to the administration. Titled, “McKinney Act Programs Could Fill Service Gaps but Not End Homelessness,” the study concluded, “Although the federal government has assisted the homeless through McKinney Act programs, homelessness remains a serious problem. GAO believes a strategy beyond the present scope of these programs’ resources is needed.”48 With McKinney programs comprising a large part of the budget for all homelessness efforts, these results were unsettling.

Another development in the fight against homelessness emerged in between the final drafting of the plan and its presentation to the general public. A push for job training for homeless individuals ran contrary to a recently passed budgetary cut. The National Alliance To End Homelessness issued an urgent memorandum to all of their members, which threatened to damage the public image of the Clinton administration’s homelessness efforts. One of the sections of the letter stated:

47 GAO Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Affairs, Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate *Homelessness: McKinney Act Programs Provide Assistance but Are Not Designed to Be the Solution*. page 1, folder “Meeting: Homeless (Cuomo, Lawing) [CHR's Office] 6/8/94 2:00-2:45” [OA 5040], Box 053, Carol Rasco, Meetings, Trips, Events, Domestic Policy Council, Systematic Processed Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

48 Ibid, 5.
First thing Monday Morning and everyday after that, call the Editor of the biggest newspaper in your area and lead Anchor(s) for the local nightly news. Sell the situation as a local story with a national twist. Let them know how much your community is losing by the Department of Labor having made a bad program/policy decision. We really need some press this week!!!!!

The Executive Director of the Domestic Policy Council, Bruce Reed, immediately began addressing the issue, and a packet of documents was sent to him by Jill Rathburn, Director of Policy. This packet contained an assessment of the situation regarding the Department of Labor’s actions concerning job training for the homeless, as well as an assortment of newspaper articles spawned by the National Alliance to End Homelessness Inc.’s call for publicity. In the assessment, organized by the National Alliance, they note that this cut in funding was not a part of the President’s executive order, but this did not diminish the negative media attention faced by the Administration. Several major newspapers ran articles on the story, notable among those were The Oakland Tribune and The Cincinnati Enquirer, though in their records, the Clinton Administration notes some seven articles discussing the problem.

Amidst all of these possible set-backs, the Federal plan was unveiled and budgetary information for the coming two years became a topic of popular discussion. Prior to an Interagency Council on the Homeless Meeting, Christopher Edley, Jr. sent out a memorandum on August 9, 1994, concerning the budgets for the 1994, 1995, and 1996 fiscal years. This


50 Jill Rathburn FAX for Bruce Reed and Carol Rasco “MEMO from Jobs for Homeless People, Inc., Washington, D.C.” March 29, 1994, page 1, folder “Homelessness” [OA 21205], Box 114 ID: 102083 Old OA 21205, Bruce Reed, Subject File, Domestic Policy Council, Systematic Processed Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

51 Ibid, 5-14.
memo cited several promising aspects of the 94 and 95 budgets. According to Edley, the ‘94 budget’s proposed $1.4 billion dollar allotment to homeless assistance was a 34 percent increase over the 1993 figures, and furthermore the $2.1 million dollar request was, “…the most ever requested for targeted homeless assistance.”

A dilemma arose in the section devoted to the 1996 budget preparation though, as the Assistant Comptroller General noted; “The FY 96 budget will continue to make homeless assistance a high priority. However, outlay caps will continue to put severe constraints on spending. We will all have to continue to think critically about how to get the most from the dollars that we have.” Therefore, though the administration continued to promote homeless assistance as a policy issue, they knew that the expansive funding that was possible in the previous years was not going to be as prevalent following 1995.

These budgetary pitfalls continued to plague the administration in the coming years, as local governing bodies and not-for-profit organizations annually requested funds allotted through the Continuum of Care program that the Administration could not provide. On December 11, 1997, The National Alliance To End Homelessness sent a letter to the President requesting $1.6 billion for the HUD Homeless Assistance Grants Program to fund shelters, longer-term housing, and support services, about which the Alliance stated; “These are turning out to be key ingredients in the efforts of local leaders to allow the most disadvantaged families and individuals to support themselves through employment.”

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53 Ibid, 3.

for these funds by stating, “…as successful as the HUD program has been…stubborn poverty, a decreasing supply of affordable housing, and a lack of stabilizing services continue in many cities and towns to fill each shelter bed as soon as it is vacated by an individual’s transition from homelessness.”55 Unfortunately, the money was not available to be granted. In a Department of Housing and Urban Development newsletter, the decision to allot only $850 million in grants made apparent the growing budgetary misfortune.56 Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Andrew Cuomo noted; “President Clinton had sought an even larger increase to $1.15 billion for the program in the 1999 budget he proposed.”57 An article in *The Economist*, published on June 10, 1997, summed up the dilemma by stating, “HUD is ill-equipped to deal with this squeeze. Since 1992, its budget has been cut from $24.77 billion to $19.59 billion…Alas, the loss of money for publicly supported housing comes at a time when there is at last almost a consensus about how to do it right.”58

Though the Clinton Administration succeeded in presenting what was the most comprehensive and coordinated plan directed specifically at eliminate homelessness in U.S. history, this goal proved too ambitious to accomplish in an eight year period. What did this

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55 Ibid, 2.
57 Ibid, 2.
mean for local lawmakers and community activists? A closer look into the difficulties of the Memphis community to address the problem during this era displays how, despite the Clinton administration’s best efforts, without the help of an efficient grassroots and local governmental response no plan could actuate change.

It is no exaggeration to say that the city of Memphis had a serious homeless problem. An article published in *The Commercial Appeal* in July of 1989 stated that there were at least 7,350 homeless residing in Memphis city, with a possible total of 9,500 in Shelby County. The study, comprised by two professors – Dr. Kate Mullins of the University of Memphis and Dr. Charles Williams of Memphis State University – cost a reported $10,000 to complete and was funded by the Community Services Agency through federal money supplied by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. While some previous estimates ranged anywhere from 200 to 7,000 persons, many earlier counts placed Memphis’s homeless total at around 500. This massive discrepancy in data posted by the Mullins and Williams study was no doubt a troubling assessment. While these counts and estimates were compiled prior to the Clinton Administrations’ term of office, dismal data in a later survey of homeless assistance providers compounded upon these numbers and created a daunting task for Memphis’s local lawmakers and homeless advocates. Published just months after President Clinton’s Executive Order on Homelessness, a *Commercial Appeal* article, titled “City rates low in service survey,” charts a local man’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guided inquiry of Memphis.

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60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.
homeless services.⁶² According to the article, the conductor of the study Rob Thompson, “issued the city’s homeless care a lowly ‘D+’ grade.”⁶³ Thompson based his findings on duplicate services and potentials for abuses and gaps in care, asserting: “I know this is going to make some people mad and people are going to disagree with it, but it’s there to get people talking about the system…It comes across pretty critical in a lot of spots, but I just tried to be honest…I couldn’t be honest to myself or the report if I just glossed over problems.”⁶⁴ The Memphis Housing and Community Development Director Robert Lipscomb challenged Thompson later in the same article saying that Thompson comprised this study at a time when the City was considering streamlining the homeless services in an attempt to align more fully with the Clinton Continuum of Care program to gain funding and efficiency.⁶⁵

Corresponding with this deficiency of care, Memphis homeless assistance projects scraped for funding in the years preceding the generous Federal grants that the Clinton administration ushered in. In 1990, “a legislative subcommittee…approved Tennessee’s first statewide effort to help the homeless: a $500,000 pool that local groups can tap for ‘supportive housing’ programs.”⁶⁶ However, with the problems that occurred in the next two years, it is obvious that this effort was paltry compared to the needs of the Memphis community. The Neighborhood Christian Center, a MIFA affiliated organization, reported in 1990 that due to waning funds they were unable to adequately serve the 5,000 people who visited their

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⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

organization.67 Similarly in 1991, The Commercial Appeal reported that 34 out of 74 housing units for the homeless faced closure because of loss of state funding; the Dixie Homes shelter was the largest shelter in Memphis, and according to Fran Theos, then Executive Director of the Memphis and Shelby County Coalition for the Homeless, this closing compounded what was already a tenuous situation in regards to housing the homeless.68 The city obviously required a greater monetary contribution in order to fully address the homeless problem.

Memphis succeeded in its attempts to secure this aid through Federal funding during the Clinton Administration. As early as 1993, the city began lobbying for money from HUD and McKinney Act Continuum of Care allotments. Mayor Willie Herenton and staff even traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby for funds, stating that the cost of his trip to would be “infinitesimal,” as he strove to, “…seek increased federal assistance in a number of priority areas, including…construction of a central facility to house the homeless.”69 In 1994, The Commercial Appeal reported more gains in Federal funding; “The City of Memphis will receive $363,140 in federal funding to assist in the development of a service center for the homeless. The center will provide transitional housing and other social services for homeless individuals and families.”70


However, Memphis did not gain the first of the real successes in acquiring Federal aid until 1995. According to a Memphis newspaper, the city won a $6.5 million dollar grant, among the $900 million distributed nationally by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development this was the largest ever received by Memphis to serve the city’s homeless population.71 Following a quote by U.S. Representative Harold Ford who stated that Memphis brought, “together several social service agencies to formulate an innovative program,” there is no doubt that the establishment of a city-wide Continuum of Care was influential in the government’s decision to award Memphis the grant.72 A similar story developed within the 1996 fiscal year, as The Commercial Appeal reported that the Clinton administration allocated $6.1 million to Memphis in grants to help fund homeless shelters and programs.73 This meant that of the $10.3 million distributed throughout Tennessee for homelessness aid, Memphis received 60 percent.74 Once again, the Federal funds were divided between care providers in a range of sectors: AIDS relief, emergency and transitional shelter programs, and substance abuse programs. These allotments aligned themselves with the Clinton administration’s Continuum of Care strategy to

71 Roland Klose, “$6.5 million will flow to city as aid to homeless; Plans for service center get a boost; AIDS home to gain,” The Commercial Appeal, June 1, 1995, section A1, folder “Memphis – Homeless Persons”, Memphis Room, Benjamin L. Hooks Public Library.

72 Ibid.


74 Ibid.
coordinate and fund homeless assistance throughout the spectrum of service providers pertaining to the homeless.

Entering President Clinton’s second term of office, the gracious giving by the Federal government continued to rain on Memphis. Following the President’s record funding in 1997 to assist in homelessness measures - $1.15 billion – Memphis continued to receive generous grant money. Of that money, $2.7 million went to three Memphis organizations; Memphis Family Shelter, Associated Catholic Charities, and the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association – or MIFA – were the recipients of the federal funding. In 1998, Tennessee as a whole was allotted $11.1 million to fund homeless assistance. Yet again the Clinton administration granted the city of Memphis a large portion of the states’ Federal aid money, $3.4 million distributed to seven local agencies to benefit the homeless. In 1999, the Hope Center was opened as a result of a $1.1

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million dollar grant from HUD. Finally, prior to Clinton’s departure from office, the city of Memphis secured another large grant; The Commercial Appeal reported:

Nine Memphis agencies and the city government were awarded $4.2 million in federal grants Saturday for programs to help the homeless…HUD said the grants to local agencies are to provide transitional and permanent housing to the homeless as well as support services, including child and health care and mental health counseling.

This breakdown of the money’s uses strictly follows the guidelines of the Continuum of Care once again.

With the help of these funds, Memphis enacted numerous measures for the homeless. However, the only completely new program funded through the Federal funds was an AIDS treatment facility established in 1992; “the Aloysius Home would be the city’s first group home giving AIDS patients a place to live and die with dignity…organized by Catholic Charities and other groups.” AIDS agencies, as well as other health centers, were a high priority in The Federal Plan To Break the Cycle of Homelessness; Priority Home!, and with good reason. This sort of care is extremely relevant to housing for the homeless; “People with AIDS and HIV-related illnesses often have serious housing problems because they become too weak to care for themselves. Studies have found half of all people with AIDS are at risk of becoming homeless


or are homeless.”

This facility is still in operation today, 18 years later, and has helped numerous persons affected with HIV and AIDS live out the remainder of their lives free from the burden of homelessness.

On the contrary, mismanagement of funds proved fatal for other community endeavors. In 1995, *The Commercial Appeal* ran an article entitled, “The Mayor’s Promises,” highlighting unmet proclamations by then mayor Willie Herenton. Among those statements of intent was one from the beginning of Clinton’s Presidency:

Herenton’s pledge: In June 1992, he said he would open two facilities for the homeless: one for counseling and other treatment, the other a single-room occupancy (SRO) facility.

What he did: The administration pumped emergency shelter grants into local nonprofit agencies that serve the homeless. Efforts to open an SRO focused for more than two years on the former Baptist Regional Rehabilitation Center on Crump. The facility won’t be in service before 1996.

However, later reports concerning the SRO facility, indicate that this 1996 estimate was still more ambitious than believed.

In July of 1996, *The Commercial Appeal* published another article focusing on various programs that had halted progress after receiving federal aid from HUD the year before.

According to the article, only one of the four agencies who received the six and a half million

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82 Ibid.


84 Ibid.

dollar grant was operational, the exception being the Aloysius House. One of the major set-backs was a change in location; “The old Baptist rehab location was dropped as a potential site because an estimated $6.2 million in renovation needs was deemed too costly.” After another property was ruled out, the city finally located a space in 1996, only 4 years after the plan to open the single resident occupancy facility was unveiled; the mayor stated, “The city has received that green light from HUD to move forward with the homeless service center…What we’re planning for is to hopefully be able (to open) in the next six months.” However, according to a 1999 article in *The Commercial Appeal*, this too was an empty promise; “The idea of a central intake center was kicked around five years ago but plans to convert the former Baptist Regional Rehabilitation Center never materialized…Another location was never found.” The remaining two agencies funded through the 1995 grant both failed to reach operation, and the funds for these floundered attempts were lost. After this failure by the city government to follow through with its promise of a new facility for the homeless, local authorities shifted their focus from creating new agencies for the homeless to strictly funding existing agencies, thereby perpetuating the stagnant result of the past decade.

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
This stagnation of homeless assistance is most evidenced by the inability of the city to provide the homeless with a single free shelter. However, despite the lack of any free shelter beds, the total number of beds in Memphis compared to cities with similar population statistics, homeless and residential, is likewise staggering. Two comparable cities are Boston, Massachusetts, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Each of these cities represented a similar population per metropolitan area, as well as a comparable homeless population. In 1990, Memphis ranked eighteenth among the nation’s largest cities with a population of 610,000.\textsuperscript{91} The Memphis homeless population near that time period was estimated at over 7000.\textsuperscript{92} Given these statistics, it is unsettling that the only operational emergency homeless shelter for men in the Memphis metropolitan area has always been the Memphis Union Mission, whose capacity is a meager 220 beds.\textsuperscript{93} While an article in the \textit{Memphis Flyer} noted in 2009 that there are 1,126 total beds for the homeless in Memphis on a given night, only the 220 beds operated by the Memphis Union Mission are for single men, who comprise 80 percent of the over 7,000 homeless persons in the city.\textsuperscript{94}


\textsuperscript{93} Bianca Phillips, “No Place to call home; Thousands of Memphians spend their nights in homeless shelters or squatting in abandoned buildings. And the problem is getting worse,” \textit{The Memphis Flyer}, January 29, 2009, \url{http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/InfoWeb?p_product=AWNB&p_theme=aggregated5&p_action=doc&p_docid=0EAF9300477B2155&p_docnum=3&p_queryname=9}.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
In contrast, Boston ranked twentieth in the nation’s largest cities, two spots behind Memphis, with a population of 574,000.\(^95\) The number of homeless residing in the city is likewise comparable, with numbers upwards of 7,000.\(^96\) However, in contrast to Memphis, Bostonians operate three emergency shelters totaling over 650 beds for men on any given night in the city.\(^97\) Boston is not the only city similar to Memphis in size and homeless population which boasts more emergency shelter beds for single men either. The Men’s Shelter of Charlotte proudly states that it is able to support 500 men each night, year round.\(^98\) Most evidentiary towards the failures of the local Memphis government at meeting the needs of the homeless community is the work of a Tennessee city. Without the massive grants supplied by the Clinton administration, the Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries supplied beds for 400 people since 1985 with no preference to gender.\(^99\) With all of the funds pouring into the city during the Clinton administration’s term of office, it is distressing that the Memphis city government did not act on the clear need for more emergency shelter beds. Furthermore, the inability for Mayor Herenton to construct the homeless services center, which supposedly would have contained both emergency shelter space and transitional housing, meant that both many homeless people who

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were ready to transition out of emergency shelters to a transitional housing environment and others in immediate need of shelter likely had nowhere to go.

Another viable reason for a lack of significant results despite massive local and national endeavors to curb homelessness is that there are no free shelters within the city of Memphis. More unsettling still, as late as the year 2000, estimates ranged anywhere from 2,700 homeless to 12,000 for Memphis.100 This is compounded by the fact that since the year 2000 those in the Memphis homeless population without funds for staying in the area shelters were met with increasingly hostile ordinances.101 In an article published in April of that year, The Commercial Appeal clearly evidenced how the city shifted their concern away from aiding the homeless to simply reducing the eye-sores that many people believe the homeless to be. Deborah Clubb reports:

Memphis is a place where street people believe they will be left alone, “and they’ve gotten used to that,” says a consultant who is urging a campaign to bring “street order maintenance to downtown. Street order maintenance refers to a combination of laws and programs to regulate public behavior. The aim is to create a downtown that will be safe, clean and inviting to the thousands drawn by such new attractions as AutoZone Park, which opened Saturday.102


The article further expounded upon fears of how the proposed ordinances could simply encourage the homeless to depart the downtown area in exchange for the streets of Midtown and the adjacent communities. Though officially, Memphis still claims to be operating under the Continuum of Care model, revenue and downtown revitalization have clearly captured policy precedent.

President Clinton’s administration sought to eliminate homelessness in the United States, and the creation of the Continuum of Care model for homeless aid combined with the largest grants ever allocated for homelessness assistance to that date did revolutionize how the Federal government addresses the homeless problem. However, despite the significant increases in funding for Memphis based charities and homeless programs throughout the Clinton administration’s term of office, the employment of the Continuum of Care model in the city could not compensate for the Memphis government’s inability to create new programs. Waning funds near the end of the Clinton administration’s term of office proved fatal for the programs’ ultimate success. Memphis, employing this same Continuum of Care model, faced different budgetary problems. Ultimately, mismanagement of the grants funded by the Clinton administration and the inability to create new and effective programs in the city proved most detrimental for the hopes of eradicating homelessness during the latter part of the 1990’s. Unable to achieve the goal of solving homelessness, local lawmakers’ recent efforts to rid themselves of homeless persons inhabiting their city continue to miss the mark of how to truly care for this indigent population. Only time will tell whether Memphis will truly make the problem of homelessness a real priority in the future.

\[103\] Ibid.