

# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

suntimes.com

August 23, 2006

## Lack of affordable housing is costly

News that growing numbers of children attending Chicago Public Schools are homeless ["Ranks of homeless CPS students soar," Aug. 14] is another reminder that safe, affordable housing isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for a thriving city.

And, while appealing for public donations for school supplies is a good idea and noble request, the real appeal should be to the mayor and aldermen to increase the money the city allots to promote and protect affordable housing. Charity is good, but it's no substitute for sound public policy. If the city increases what's called the "corporate contribution for housing" in the annual budget, more of this money can be earmarked for affordable housing, which helps combat homelessness.

The "corporate contribution," which comes from fees and other sources for city revenue, allows the Department of Housing to support affordable housing preservation through grants to nonprofit community development corporations, pay department staff and fund vital programs. For nearly a decade, however, the city's direct commitment to affordable housing has hovered at \$11 million to \$15 million, not counting money from federal sources and other accounting formulas used to compute the total amount.

While the city's corporate contribution has not changed, the affordable housing crisis has changed in significant ways, with the loss of rental housing stock, demolition of Chicago Housing Authority developments, increased condo conversions and the expiration of agreements between building owners and the federal government to keep apartments at affordable rates.

Unless the city shows a greater commitment by putting more money into affordable housing, the problem of homeless schoolkids is likely to grow as neighborhoods undergo rapid change and gentrification. Studies show stable housing affects student performances just as good breakfasts and nutritious lunches help children learn. Children unsure of where they will sleep, study or stay have a harder time doing well in the classroom.

With the city budget hearings coming up this week, it's time for the mayor and aldermen to step up. Increasing the corporate contribution for housing -- which also supports successful programs that allow police officers and teachers to afford to live in the city, for example -- is a good first step. Why not start by increasing money to help children and their families have places to call home? They deserve it and the city can do it.

**Kevin Jackson, executive director,  
Chicago Rehab Network**