New Initiative for Ending Homelessness Is Needed
By Daniel J. Macke And The Rev. Trey Hammond

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Metropolitan Homelessness Project, we commend Mayor Richard Berry's new initiative, Albuquerque Heading Home, as an innovative way of helping those who experience homelessness to make their way back to stability.

Our organization operates the Albuquerque Opportunity Center, where we provide beds and programs for 74 men daily to help them exit homelessness. We believe the best way to help those who are most vulnerable is a "Housing First" model such as this initiative utilizes.

The Housing First model is built upon years of research that proves how people successfully transition out of homelessness. Instead of permanent housing as a reward for staying in shelters and participating in programs, the housing comes first and services are provided as needed.

The program the mayor is rolling out will identify 75 people, many of them chronically homeless and already well-known to those of us providing services. They will be provided housing and case management to re-establish their lives.

This is a part of a national effort with a goal of helping 100,000 people/families find homes. Funds for the housing come from existing monies in the Veterans Administration and the Family and Community Services Department of the city.

There has been some concern expressed that this is a roundup of homeless people in an effort to move them out of the Downtown corridor. This initiative is not about moving homeless people to be less visible, but, rather — with them — to find housing. Any geographical focus on Downtown reflects the reality of it being a hub for many living on the street.

The truth is that we in the shelter business should employ every strategy possible to help those we are serving to leave homelessness, including this one,
because as long as people are in shelters they are still technically "homeless." It would be great if such a model made shelters unnecessary and obsolete, because we had ended homelessness. That is our goal.

When the city approached our organization about being the coordinating agency for the effort, we were pleased to offer our executive director, Dennis Plummer, to work with the city, the business community and other service providers to make this effort successful. If this effort is successful, it will guide the way the national, state and local governments fund homeless efforts. On a personal level, it will provide a life-changing opportunity for people who are our unhoused neighbors.

We invite Albuquerque to get behind the mayor's initiative, and if you are interested in learning more or volunteering, please call Metropolitan Homelessness Project or the city's 311 help line. Volunteer online at: www.abqheadinghome.org.

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