



**Testimony to the Human Services Committee  
New York State Senate and Assembly  
February 10, 2010**

**Submitted by Linda Whittle-Myricks  
Director, Jericho Project**

Thank you for allowing the Jericho Project to submit this testimony. I am the Director of Jericho House in Central Harlem, one of five supportive housing residences owned and operated by the Jericho Project. I am submitting this testimony about the proposed cuts to the SRO Support Subsidy Program, and how these cuts will be devastating to the Jericho Project and the hundreds of homeless individuals we serve every year.

Jericho Project was founded in 1983 on the belief that every homeless individual can make transformational change towards a better life. Over the past 27 years Jericho Project has grown from a soup kitchen in the basement of a church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to providing 300 units of supportive housing to formerly homeless men and women in recovery from substance abuse.

Jericho Project's mission is to end homelessness at its roots by creating a community that inspires individual change, fosters sustainable independence, and motivates men and women to reach their greatest potential. Jericho's nationally-recognized program model combines supportive housing, individualized relapse prevention counseling, family reunification support, vocational and educational programming, and ongoing aftercare to more than 300 formerly homeless individuals annually.

In New York State, the SRO Support Subsidy helps keep more than 13,000 individuals in their homes and off the streets. Jericho Project has five SRO Support Subsidy contracts with the New York City Department of Homeless Services. Projects under this contact are in Central Harlem in Manhattan, and University Heights, Morris Heights, and Tremont in the Bronx.

Jericho's SRO Support Subsidy contracts represent more than two-thirds of services funding for these projects. A cut to this vital program will directly affect more than 300 of our tenants at Jericho Project as well as 15 staff members whose salaries are supported through the SRO Support Subsidy Program. These staff members provide essential services such as case management, crisis intervention, family reunification, substance abuse counseling, and mental health counseling. Because of them, more than 95% of our residents maintain permanent housing and nearly one-half are employed. Without these services, our tenants will not be able to maintain the stability and independence they are

working so hard to achieve. Sadly, many of them will become homeless again, putting an enormous strain and expense on other public programs such as the shelter system, hospitals, law enforcement, etc.

I have been employed by the Jericho Project for 15 years, and have been Director of Jericho House in Harlem for nearly three years. Jericho House, located on Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and 121<sup>st</sup> Street, is home to 56 remarkable men and women who, despite decades of homelessness and substance abuse, are making transformational changes in their lives.

I know how important these services are because I am a graduate of Jericho House myself. Eighteen years ago, when I came to Jericho I was 37 years old. I had an eighth grade education, a short work history, and a long history of alcohol and substance abuse. I had tried many times before to get myself clean and sober, but nothing seemed to work for me. It wasn't until I entered Jericho that I realized that this was where I was finally going to get my life together. What made Jericho work for me was the support of staff and administration. They not only cared about you, they walked with you through the process. They didn't just tell you how to do it, they actually showed you how to do it. With the help of Jericho, I was able to maintain my sobriety and while here I utilized the services that were at my disposal. I got my GED in April 1993 and that same year I entered college at Borough of Manhattan Community College. In 1995 welfare reform kicked in and I was threatened with having to leave school. I had one year left before I got my associate's degree. Jericho stepped in and offered me employment through their SRO Support Subsidy contract. This enabled me to continue my education and become a tax paying citizen. Today, I am the Director of the supportive housing residence where I once lived, hold a Master's degree in Social Work from New York University, and have a brand new life.

I strongly urge the Social Services Committee to fully fund the SRO Support Subsidy Program at the \$22.2 million level. These funds are urgently needed to provide formerly homeless men and women in both existing and new projects with the services they need to remain housed and be independent. In the long-run, these proposed cuts will cost the State substantially more and will take away opportunities for thousands of formerly homeless people like me to regain their lives.