June 30, 2015

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor
PL05 The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott,

On behalf of the Florida Council on Homelessness, its members and our multiple state agency partners, I submit the “Council on Homelessness 2015 Report” for your consideration.

In accordance with state law, the Council has prepared recommendations for reducing homelessness in our state. The report also summarizes the extent of homelessness and characteristics of the men, women and children who do not have their own home.

I want to thank the members of the Council for taking on this responsibility and working diligently to study the issue and identify targeted solutions. Their efforts are making a difference in helping reduce the number of Floridians without a place to live.

The 2015 Report reflects a significant reduction in homelessness in Florida. This is due in large part to Florida’s improving economy. It is also a result of community partnerships between Continuums of Care, local commissions, nonprofits, faith organizations, local government and the private sector. There has been an especially positive reduction in the number of homeless veterans in our state. Several Florida Mayors and communities have made the commitment to end veteran homelessness by the end of this year; and they are making great progress in achieving this goal.

However, unfortunately, there are still thousands of Floridians without a home. But, Florida’s successes to date show that homelessness is not an intractable issue; there are ways to significantly reduce homelessness. Florida must continue to work diligently to reduce the number of persons without a place to live.

The recommendations in this report are designed to build upon and expand the success Florida has achieved in recent years. The Council encourages several potential solutions, from providing flexible funding to supporting local initiatives to helping households with extremely low incomes. And the Council places an emphasis on the need to continue increasing the supply of affordable housing for our homeless neighbors. The lack of an affordable place to live is the number one cause of homelessness.

There is no doubt that effective private and public collaboration at the State and local levels combined with strong community participation is a key to solving homelessness, as is breaking down the barriers to talking about it. I congratulate this Council on their work to do just that, and we appreciate your continued support of these efforts.

Sincerely,

Shannon Nazworth
Chairperson
homeless students and their families in many ways including collaboration with their local community partners. Here are some of their stories.

**Sarasota County Schools**

The Sarasota County Schools’ Homeless Education Program (Schoolhouse Link), in addition to helping students with educational needs, helps homeless families connect with local resources such as the Sarasota Housing Authority (SHA). In 2014, the SHA Board voted to annually set aside 15 Section 8 Housing Vouchers for chronically homeless families selected by Schoolhouse Link. Their goal was to improve educational outcomes and create opportunities for families by providing stable housing.

Chronically homeless for years, single mom Amber and her four school-age daughters were one of the first families selected for this program. They have benefitted tremendously from having stable, sustainable housing. Prior to this placement, the family’s housing instability, unfortunately, affected every aspect of the family’s life, including the girls’ education. They struggled with their attendance and grades. The girls had difficulty fitting in and problems with self-esteem and wellness. Now, Amber states, “I feel like we are finally winning. We were able to celebrate the holidays for the first time in our own home and all of my girls have good school attendance and are on the honor roll now.” Today and tomorrow are brighter for Amber and her children because housing and education are both community priorities in Sarasota County.

**Santa Rosa County**

The One Family, One Year, One Home Transitional Housing Program is a collaborative effort between the Santa Rosa County School District, ESCAROSA Coalition on the Homeless, Pensacola Habitat for Humanity, and Family Promise, a Faith-based Emergency Housing Program. With limited transitional housing in Santa Rosa County, the four groups created transitional housing by refurbishing repossessed Habitat houses that were sitting empty. Homeless families with children who participated in the program received intensive case management,