



Sustaining the Missouri Housing Trust Fund

JEFFERSON CITY — In Missouri, the state works in a number of ways to ensure no one is without affordable housing or a place to live. Recently, I was appointed chair of a newly formed committee that will examine ways to improve, and increase funding for the Missouri Housing Trust Fund — a fund that provides housing and housing services to very low-income families and individuals across the state.

Senate Leader Mike Gibbons (R-Kirkwood) recently formed the five-member Senate Select Committee on the Missouri Housing Trust Fund to find ways to ensure the trust fund continues to address the needs of low-income households and meet the financial needs for developing low-income housing projects where they are needed the most. (This includes homeless shelters and facilities.) Since the trust fund was initiated in 1994, Missouri has invested tens of millions of dollars to support new construction, rehabilitation, rental assistance and other housing activities targeted towards meeting the needs of low- to very low-income Missourians.

The trust fund is administered by the Missouri Housing Development Commission and is supported by recording fees on real estate documents filed in the state. Funding is dependent on the level of real estate activity, and so it is being heavily impacted by challenging economic times. Annual funding has ranged between \$5 million and \$6 million during the past few years, but that figure is expected to significantly drop.

In the next few months, the committee and I will seek public input, possibly through forums conducted around the state, and prepare a report of our findings and recommendations to the state legislature by Jan. 1, 2009. It is my hope that we will be able to find common-sense solutions to make sure there is assistance available for Missourians who can't afford housing and that funds are dedicated to activities that best serve those in greatest need.

Most of us take shelter and enough money to live for granted. For some Missourians living well below the poverty level, this trust fund has made a tremendous difference in bringing relief and hope to a dire situation.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

###