



NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

Dedicated solely to ending America's affordable housing crisis.

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For more information, contact:
Amrit Dhillon, (202) 662-1530

Leading Affordable Housing Advocate Passes Away at 78

WASHINGTON DC (March 18, 2005) -- It is with great sadness that the National Low Income Housing Coalition must announce the death of Cushing N. Dolbeare, our Founder and Chair Emeritus. Cushing died of cancer on March 17, 2005 at her home in Mitchellville, MD. She was 78.

Cushing began the National Low Income Housing Coalition in 1974 when she organized the Ad Hoc Low Income Housing Coalition in response to the Nixon Administration's moratorium on federal housing programs. She served as NLIHC's Executive Director from 1977 to 1984 and again from 1993 to 1994. She remained active with NLIHC as a researcher, policy analyst and board member until her death.

Cushing was one of the nation's leading experts on federal housing policy and the housing circumstances of low-income people. She designed the methodology for and was the original author of *Out of Reach*, NLIHC's widely cited annual report on the gap between housing costs and wages of low-income people. She was also well-known for her work on analyzing federal housing subsidies, documenting the disparity between the cost of tax-based subsidies that benefit homeowners and direct spending on housing assistance for low-income households.

"Cushing was both the conscience and the brains of the affordable housing movement. There is no one else like her. Her passing is a great loss to the nation, but especially to low-income people whose well-being was her life's work," said Sheila Crowley, President of the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Bill Faith, Chair of the NLIHC Board of Directors, said, "Over the years, millions of people have obtained homes they can afford due in no small part to the dedicated perseverance of someone they never met, Cushing Dolbeare."

Just last week, Cushing gave a speech at the National Council of State Housing Agencies, where she recalled President Roosevelt's inaugural address, when he referred to one third of the nation being ill-clothed, one third being ill-fed and one third ill-housed. Today, she said, only the statement about housing remains true. Based on her analysis, 95 million people, one third of all people in the U.S., have a housing problem. She spoke of her continued distress at the amount the government spends on mortgage interest and other homeownership deductions compared to the amount spent to meet housing needs for low- and moderate-income households. "If we were willing and able, and we are able, to provide the same level of support that we provide for homeownership to low- and moderate-households, we could solve our affordable housing problem in 10 years," she said.

In 2002, Cushing was honored in 2002 with the Heinz Award for the Human Condition, given by the Heinz Family Foundation in memory of the late Senator John Heinz (R-PA), "in recognition for 50 years of tireless commitment to the principle that decent housing is basic to our social fabric." She and her husband Louis donated the award of \$250,000 to the National Low Income Housing Coalition as the lead gift to the Cushing N. Dolbeare Endowment Fund established by the National Low Income Housing Coalition Board of Directors in 2002 in honor of her 50 years as a low-income housing advocate.

Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) appointed Cushing to the Bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission, chartered by Congress in 2000 to examine and make recommendations to Congress on providing affordable housing for all Americans. In 2002, she was appointed Senior Scholar at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. At the time of her death, she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Enterprise Foundation, and the Boards of Directors of the Housing Assistance Council, the Alliance for Healthy Homes and the National Housing Conference.

She was a mentor to countless housing advocates and researchers. In 1995, Jason DeParle wrote in the *New York Times* that she was the "dean" of the Washington corps of housing advocates. Her honest assessments and unassuming manner made her a trusted source of information and a model for the best kind of lobbying. Dolbeare was respected on both sides of the aisle for her objective analysis and sound judgment.

She began her career in housing in 1952 at the Baltimore's Citizen's Planning and Housing Association. Four years later, she became the assistant director and then managing director of the Philadelphia Housing Association. Since her "retirement" from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, she served as a consultant to numerous housing research projects and housing organizations, including the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Center for Lead-Safe Housing.

Several Secretaries of Housing and Urban Development considered Cushing to be a friend and advisor. Former HUD secretaries Carla Hills, Jack Kemp, Henry Cisneros and Andrew Cuomo serve as honorary chairs for the Cushing N. Dolbeare Endowment Fund campaign, as does former Senator Edward Brooke (R-MA). She served as Senator Brooke's alternate on the President's Commission on Housing in 1981-82. She chaired the HUD/EPA Task Force on Lead Paint Hazard Reduction and Financing from 1993-95.

An honors graduate of Swarthmore College in 1949, Dolbeare was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Swarthmore in 1991 and an Honorary Doctor of Public Service from Drake University in 2004. Among her many awards were the Clay Cochran Award for Distinguished Service in Housing for the Rural Poor from the Housing Assistance Council in 2004, the Graciela Olivarez Award from the National Council of LaRaza in 1999, the Housing Person of the Year from the National Housing Conference in 1995, the John Macy Award from the National Alliance to End Homelessness in 1992, and the Paul Davidoff Award from the American Planning Association in 1991.

Cushing is survived by her husband of 49 years, Louis P. Dolbeare, their son Louis N. Dolbeare of San Francisco, CA, their daughter Mary O'Kane of Seattle, WA, her sister Alice Lynd of Niles, OH, and four grandchildren. She was born Mary Cushing Niles in Hartford, CT. Her parents were Mary Cushing Howard Niles and Henry E. Miles, who together had a management consulting practice that took the family all over the country when Cushing was growing up.

Plans for a memorial service in Washington, DC in April are underway and will be announced shortly. Condolences to the family can be sent in care of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1012 14th St. NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20005. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, memorial gifts be made to the Cushing N. Dolbeare Endowment Fund at the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

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