The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2017

Homelessness jeopardizes the health and well-being of record numbers of children and youth, putting future generations at risk of adult homelessness. Communities need to be able to use HUD Homeless Assistance funding more flexibly, effectively, and appropriately to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

Youth and Family Homelessness is at Record Levels[i]

- Public schools reported 1.2 million homeless children and youth, preK-12, in the 2014—2015 school year. This is a 3.5% increase over three years, and a 34% increase since the recession ended in the summer of 2009.
- Thirty-five states reported an increase in their homeless student populations between 2012 and 2014. Twenty-one states experienced growth of 10% or more.
- Homelessness among unaccompanied homeless youth saw the most marked increase, increasing by 21% over three years, to reach 95,032 students.

Youth and Family Homelessness is Different Than Adult Homelessness[ii]

- Homeless families with children and unaccompanied youth stay wherever they can, move frequently between living situations, and often hide their situation due to fear of child welfare involvement.
- Often, families and youth must stay in motels, or with others temporarily, because there is no family or youth shelter in the community, shelters are full, or shelter policies exclude them.
- These living situations are precarious, crowded, unstable, and often unsafe, putting youth and families at high risk of harm, abuse, and neglect.

Homeless Youth are at High Risk for Trafficking and Other Abuse[iii]

- According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, runaway/homeless and unstable housing statuses are among the top five risk factors for human trafficking.
- Covenant House New York, a provider of housing and services to homeless youth, found that approximately one in four youth receiving their services had been a victim of sex trafficking.
- Forty-one percent of homeless youth surveyed in Louisville and Southern Indiana said they'd been victims of sex trafficking at least once.

Homelessness Breaks Up Families, and Contributes to Foster Care Placement[iv]

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) reports that approximately 27,000 children enter foster care as a result of housing problems.
- More than 130,000 foster children – a third of children in out-of-home care – are unable to reunify with their families because of their parent's lack of housing. The cost of foster care for these children exceeds $2.3 billion dollars annually, in largely mandatory federal spending.
- Families living in doubled-up homeless situations are more likely to be separated than their peers who have access to shelter services.

Homelessness Harms Education, Health, and Safety, Putting Children and Youth at Risk of Adult Homelessness[v]

- Homelessness can harm children before they are even born. Research shows that pregnant women experiencing homelessness are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care than housed mothers, and their children are at increased risk for low birth weight.
- A 2015 study found that the younger and longer a child experiences homelessness, the greater the cumulative toll of negative health outcomes.
- Homelessness is associated with an 87% increased likelihood of dropping out of school; States have found higher drop-out rates and lower graduation rates for homeless youth compared to housed, poor youth.

- Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that youth experiencing homelessness report significantly higher rates of victimization, hunger, PTSD, exposure to violence, and suicidality than other students. These factors are predictive of adverse well-being and productivity outcomes later in life.

Federal Policy Change is Needed Now

HUD Homeless Assistance must be re-tooled to allow communities more flexibility to effectively use federal funding to meet the unique developmental needs of children, youth, and families.

- Communities must be allowed to use available resources to serve homeless children, youth and families (HCYF) in a way that is responsive to the unique needs of each community; there is not one size that fits all.
  → In the past, HUD has forced a national priority for certain populations and program models, regardless of local assessment of needs. The result is fewer services for, and less attention to, families and youth. Moreover, the approaches that HUD has imposed through its national priorities are not effective for HCYF.
- HUD homeless assistance eligibility criteria must be aligned with federal, state, and local child and youth serving systems.
  → Child and youth serving systems, including early childhood programs and public schools, recognize all of the forms of homelessness that children, youth and families experience, but HUD does not. Instead, HUD homeless assistance eligibility criteria exclude some of the most vulnerable HCYF from the programs/services that they need.
- HUD homeless assistance data must include people in all homeless situations.
  → Currently, the HUD Point-in-Time count does not include the homeless living situations that are most common for families and youth. This keeps HCYF invisible and excluded from policy decision-making. Consequently, HCYF are not considered in local planning, which means lower awareness, poor targeting, and fewer resources from both public and private sources.
- Directly or indirectly, HUD homeless assistance must provide support for the services that are critical to long-term success for HCYF, including child care, education, employment assistance, job training, and case management.
  → In the past, HUD's narrow focus on housing has reduced funding for, and emphasis on, these and other essential services.
  → Lack of collaboration with child and youth serving agencies has prevented HCYF from receiving all services for which they are eligible, including the education and supportive services they need to obtain decent jobs and afford housing as adults.

How the Homeless Children and Youth Act Helps

The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2017 restores local decision-making and improves the ability of communities to meet the unique developmental needs of homeless children, youth, and families, which is the best long-term strategy to reduce all forms of homelessness.

- Provides flexibility to local communities to use available resources to meet the needs that they identify.
- Allows communities to provide housing and services tailored to the unique needs of each homeless population, including HCYF.
- Allows communities to serve some of the most vulnerable HCYF by aligning HUD Homeless Assistance eligibility criteria with other federal HCYF programs.
- Increases visibility and awareness of HCYF through data transparency and more accurate counts, thus helping communities to leverage and attract more public/private resources to address homelessness.
- Aligns HUD homeless assistance with the Every Student Succeeds Act and the Child Care and Development Fund to improve identification and enrollment of HCY in early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary education.
- Encourages local innovation and success by allowing HUD to award bonuses and incentives for strategies that meet local needs.

For more information and an endorser list, visit www.helphomelessyouthnow.org, or contact:

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