



The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2015 (H.R. 576/S. 256)

The Problem: Government Red Tape Denies Homeless Children and Youth¹ the Help They Need

- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) current definition of homelessness excludes most children and youth who are actually homeless: those staying in motels, or temporarily with others because they have nowhere else to go. Over 1.2 million homeless students were identified by public schools last year.
- Families with children and youth who are on their own often must stay temporarily in motels or with others because there is no family or youth shelter in the community, shelters are full, or because shelter policies exclude them.
- Rural, suburban, and small city children, youth and families face additional hurdles, because more than half of HUD-funded emergency shelter beds are located in major cities.
- Many families and youth stay wherever they can, moving from a shelter one night, to a couch in someone else's home, to a motel, to yet another person's couch or basement floor. Where they lay their head does not determine their housing or service needs.
- Hidden homeless children and youth face serious health and safety threats, including higher risk of physical and sexual abuse and trafficking:
 - A 17-year-old Michigan boy was raped by the person he was staying with, but could not leave because he had nowhere else to go.
 - A toddler in Louisiana developed a serious skin infection due to carpet conditions at the motel where his family stayed. By the age of 2, he wasn't walking.
 - A 16-year-old in Washington State dropped out of school in order to work to pay for the motel rooms where her family of five stayed while fleeing domestic violence.
 - When her parents died, a 13-year-old girl in Ohio became homeless and was moving from couch to couch. A man promised her stable housing, and then trafficked her.
- Other federal programs - including domestic violence, health, youth, education, and early childhood programs - acknowledge this and recognize these children and youth as homeless.

¹ "Children" refers to children under age 18 who are part of intact families. "Youth" refers to young people between the ages of 12-24, many of who are unaccompanied, without parents or guardians.

- Yet due to HUD’s narrow definition of homelessness, these children and youth are ineligible for critical HUD homelessness assistance including emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and supportive services such as counseling.
- HUD policies force communities seeking homelessness funding to prioritize single adults, even if the need in their community is greater among families and youth.
- HUD’s data is incomplete and contributes to the invisibility of homeless children and youth. Lack of accurate information prevents local and state action, including private and public funding, to assist these children and youth.

The Solution: The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2015

- Amends HUD’s definition of homelessness to include children and youth verified as homeless through HUD’s homeless assistance programs and other federal programs such as Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, Violence Against Women programs, and public school district homeless liaisons.
- Eliminates complex documentation requirements for “proving” homelessness, such as evidence of multiple moves, or length of time spent without housing. Under the Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2014, a HUD homeless service provider could make a simple determination that a family or youth in a motel, or staying temporarily with others, is eligible, or accept a referral from another federal program.
- Prohibits HUD from overriding local communities. Local service providers are the best equipped to evaluate which homeless populations have the greatest unmet needs, and where federal homelessness resources are best targeted.
- Amends federal homeless data collection and reporting requirements to ensure that data currently collected on all homeless children, youth, and families is made available to the public, providing an accurate and honest accounting of homelessness in America.
- Contains no new mandates, and costs nothing. Whether newly eligible families and youth receive services would depend on communities’ assessments of their own needs.

The needs of homeless children and youth do not depend on where they happen to find a place to sleep on a given night. The Homeless Children and Youth Act will help over one million homeless children and youth lead safer, healthier lives and have a better chance for a brighter future by ensuring a response to homelessness that is based on an honest and accurate understanding of the problem, and by empowering those closest to the problem to design and implement the best local response.

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