

The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2017: Using Federal Funding Effectively to Meet Local Needs

Under current law, communities are prohibited from using federal funding effectively to meet the needs they identify.

- Many local communities have identified youth and family homelessness as urgent priorities.
- Nonetheless, HUD has created strong national priorities for projects that serve single adults who are chronically homeless, regardless of identified local needs. Communities are penalized for prioritizing programs serving families and unaccompanied youth.
- HUD's eligibility criteria exclude the most common situations for families and unaccompanied youth: staying in motels, or temporarily with others because there is no place else to stay. These situations put youth and families at grave risk of victimization and violence. Many youth and families who cycle through these living situations are just as vulnerable – if not more so- than those who meet HUD's eligibility criteria.
- Even if local communities identify these youth or families as having the most pressing unmet needs, communities cannot use HUD homeless assistance funds to serve them, except under extremely limited, nearly impossible, conditions.
- HUD has imposed national priorities for program models that are not effective in meeting the needs of many homeless youth and families.
- Service providers are forced to put families and youth into emergency shelters or motels in order to qualify them for permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing programs. This is a waste of emergency shelter dollars. Moreover, it creates another destabilizing move.

The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2017 (H.R. 1511/S. 611) gives communities the flexibility to use federal funding effectively and appropriately to meet local needs, and ensures that those most in need of assistance receive it.

- Whether or not newly eligible children and youth receive services will depend on communities' local needs assessments. Communities that identify greater needs for single adults, or other populations, will be free to continue to prioritize programs to serve them.
- Communities will be allowed to provide housing and services tailored to the unique needs of each homeless population.
- Communities that establish coordinated assessment systems will be required to ensure that those most in need of assistance receive it, and that the criteria used to assess need employ separate, age-appropriate criteria to assess the safety and needs of children and youth.

The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2017 will help communities leverage additional resources and support – both public and private – to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

- HUD homeless assistance is not the sole source of funding for homeless services. Other public and private sources contribute significantly. Yet the HUD definition of homelessness and its Point in Time Count mask the extent of the need for families and youth, making it much more difficult to raise awareness of the problem of child and youth homelessness among non-federal sources of funds.
- When the real need is known and validated by all agencies, non-federal funders are more likely to contribute. The HCYA of 2017 increases visibility and awareness of homeless children, youth, and families through data transparency and more accurate counts, thus helping communities leverage and attract more public and private resources to address homelessness.
- By aligning HUD homeless assistance with other child and youth serving systems, the Homeless Children and Youth Act will help ensure that children, youth, and families receive all services for which they are eligible, including child care, education, and the supportive services they need to obtain decent jobs and afford housing as adults.

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

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