

Children and Families Facing Eviction: Policy Recommendations to Support Stability

July 19, 2017



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, millions of American families are evicted from their homes. Families with children are evicted at much higher rates, and children who experience eviction often face high rates of mobility and unstable living environments that can have a negative impact on their education, physical health, mental health, and interpersonal relationships.¹

Interventions to support children and families who have been evicted must acknowledge all of the barriers to stability, and address both the reasons why the family was evicted as well as the trauma experienced as a result of the eviction.

- **INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Any efforts to increase affordable housing in the U.S. should a) prioritize children and families, who face higher rates of homelessness and poverty at a time when children are undergoing critical stages of development and b) pair housing with wraparound services that include trauma-informed care. This includes increasing rental assistance and requiring public housing authorities and public school systems to coordinate to improve the educational outcomes of children living in subsidized housing.^{2,3}

- **EXPAND ACCESS TO CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES**

Civil legal services help to keep children and families in their home and protect them from the negative effects that occur once a family is evicted. Yet most low-income families lack access to these services. The Equal Opportunity for Residential Representation Act of 2017 (H.R. 1146) would start to address the need for civil legal services by creating a pilot program to provide grants to organizations that provide civil legal services to families facing eviction, landlord/tenant disputes, fair housing discrimination, and other housing-related issues.

- **PASS THE HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT (S. 611/H.R. 1511)**

Families who are evicted are at high risk for experiencing homelessness, causing further destabilization and negative consequences for child development. Yet many homeless families and unaccompanied youth are not eligible for homeless assistance services administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) due to narrow eligibility criteria and burdensome documentation requirements.

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The bipartisan Homeless Children and Youth Act (S. 611/H.R. 1511) would provide flexibility to local communities to use federal homeless assistance dollars more effectively, allowing them to make the determination as to who are the most vulnerable homeless families, children and youth in their region and target existing resources to them. It also requires collaboration between homeless family service providers and early childhood programs, institutions of higher education and local education agencies.⁴

- **STRENGTHEN FAMILY TAX CREDITS**

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) lifted five million children out of poverty in 2015.⁵ Despite their effectiveness, improvements are needed. Due to the limited refundability of the CTC, it is limited in reaching households with little or no earnings, and families with young children do not receive any additional amount despite incurring increased costs during this time, such as child care, health care, and diapers. We need to strengthen the CTC by making it fully refundable and increasing the credit for families with young children.⁶

- **REFORM THE TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) PROGRAM**

For families struggling to maintain housing, cash assistance is critical. It provides a lifeline for covering basic needs such as rent, utilities and food and promotes child development and academic achievement. Yet despite research⁷ showing that money matters for child development and academic achievement, just under 25 percent of all poor families that are eligible for cash assistance receive it. There are several ways to strengthen TANF by holding states accountable for using funds strategically to reduce child poverty, such as through helping parents pursue higher education, improving TANF's responsiveness during economic downturns, and increasing resources.

- **SUPPORT TRANSITION-AGED FOSTER YOUTH AND STABILIZE FAMILIES AT RISK OF ENTERING CARE**

Families who are evicted, or at risk of eviction, may also be involved with the child welfare system and face the removal of their children because they cannot adequately care for them or receive services to help them achieve stability. The Family First Prevention Services Act (H.R. 253) would allow federal reimbursement for in-home parenting skills, mental health treatment, and substance-abuse treatment to help stabilize families so that their children do not have to be removed from their homes. In addition, more Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers should be made available so fewer transition aged youth face housing instability when they leave the child welfare system.

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- **PROTECT MEDICAID AND THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (CHIP)**

Any health care legislation that would severely cut funding to Medicaid or CHIP would be devastating to children's health in America. The Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA) currently being considered in the Senate would eviscerate Medicaid by cutting almost \$800 billion by imposing draconian and arbitrary cuts and per capita caps upon the program. Moreover, BCRA includes a provision encouraging states to conduct more frequent eligibility determinations. This would be particularly harmful to homeless children and families, for their high mobility may result in them missing deadlines or being fully disenrolled due to an address change. We need to protect Medicaid and extend CHIP funding, which expires on September 30, 2017. A long-term funding extension for CHIP is urgent as state budgets for FY18 are counting on it to continue.

- **INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**

Homelessness is a threat to the healthy development of infants and toddlers. In fact, infants are at the highest risk of living in a homeless shelter. Quality child care and preschool are critical to helping homeless families find stability. If our nation wants to strengthen families and provide support for babies and toddlers at a critical time when their brain and physical development lays the foundation for future learning, we must invest greater resources in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, including reauthorizing and expanding MIECHV for a 5-year period with an increase in funding to \$800 million.

- **IMPROVE EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Many families facing eviction live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty where schools lack resources due to inequitable allocation at the federal, state, and local levels. The most effective way to address these disparities is to target funds to public schools in areas of concentrated poverty through Title I, Part A program grants. In addition, the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorized and increased funding for the Community Support for Schools Success Program, which provides grants to community schools that offer more holistic approaches to children's education by pairing classroom curriculum with social services. Community schools are an evidence-based intervention and this strategy should be implemented by more schools and included in ESSA state plans.⁸

For homeless children and youth, the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth program provides protections and services to ensure they can still enroll in and attend school. To fully implement its provisions, this program needs the fully authorized amount of \$85 million provided in ESSA so every homeless student can succeed.⁹

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- **ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS IN HOUSING**

Families that get evicted often move into substandard housing with housing code violations and environmental hazards because they have no other choice. This can include exposure to lead paint, which is destructive to a child's developing brain and nervous system, or asthma triggers such as mold, rodents, or dust. Legal protections are needed to ensure that no child is living in a home with these hazards.¹⁰ To remove these hazards, we need increased support for programs such as HUD's Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control Program and the EPA's Lead Risk Reduction Program.

All children at-risk of lead poisoning should be screened, and when lead poisoning is found, services to mitigate the effects of lead poisoning are critical, such as comprehensive health care services through Medicaid, early childhood programs, and improved special education services and educational support. For children with asthma, the CDC's National Asthma Control Program assists states in combatting asthma through surveillance, training and public education. This program currently provides grants to less than half of all states and needs increased support.

- **CREATE A RIGHT TO HOUSING FOR CHILDREN**

Children should have an unequivocal right to stable housing in the United States. Currently, there is no child rights framework in the United States that helps policymakers prioritize children when making decisions that affect them, or allow a legal course of action for children to gain access to adequate living conditions. In the 114th Congress, H. Res. 476 was introduced,¹¹ which proposed such a framework and articulated "the right to have the child's essential needs met, including nutritious food, safe and accessible shelter, clothing, health care, and accessible transportation, the right to a safe and healthy environment, including homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities, and the right to have appropriate legal representation and a child advocate in legal proceedings to represent the interest of the child."

A more comprehensive report, *Supporting Children and Families Facing Eviction*, is available at www.campaignforchildren.org.



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² Galvez, Martha M., and Simington, Jasmine, *Housing and Education Partnerships: A Case Study of Vancouver, Washington*, Urban Institute, April 9, 2015, available at:

<http://www.urban.org/research/publication/housing-and-education-partnerships-case-study-vancouver-washington>

³ King County Housing Authority, "Education Initiatives," last visited June 26, 2017, available at: <https://www.kcha.org/about/education/>.

⁴ "Help Homeless Children and Youth Now!" last visited July 11, 2017, available at: <http://helphomelesskidsnow.org/facts/>.

⁵ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: The Earned Income Tax Credit," updated October 21, 2016, available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/policy-basics-the-earned-income-tax-credit>

⁶ First Focus, MomsRising, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Prosperity Now, Save the Children Action Network and with research assistance on the child tax credit, the Century Foundation, Family Tax Policy: A Path Forward to Lifting Children out of Poverty, U.S. Child Poverty Action Group, March 14, 2017

⁷ Cooper, Kerris and Stewart, Kitty, *Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, October 2013, available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/does-money-affect-children%E2%80%99s-outcomes>.

⁸ Oakes, Jeannie, Maier, Anna and Daniel, Julia, *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*, National Education Policy Center and Learning Policy Institute, June 2017, available at: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-equitable-improvement-brief>.

⁹ SchoolHouse Connection, "The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015: Amendments to the McKinney-Vento Act," March 7, 2017, available at: <http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/COSA-article-formatted.pdf>.

¹⁰ City of Philadelphia, Lead and Healthy Homes Program: Lead Paint Disclosure and Certification Law, last visited June 27, 2017, available at:

<http://www.phila.gov/health/childhoodlead/LeadPaintLaw.html>.

¹¹ Mathur, Richa "Children's Bill of Rights," First Focus Campaign for Children, October 6, 2015, available at: <https://campaignforchildren.org/resources/fact-sheet/childrens-bill-of-rights/>.