



August 2, 2023

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Todd Young
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Neguse
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Van Hollen and Young and Representatives Neguse and Fitzpatrick:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to express our support for the bipartisan, bicameral Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act of 2023 (S. 1257/H.R. 3776).

Housing instability can have a great impact on the physical health, mental health, and education of children and negatively influence their long-term outcomes. Housing instability can impact brain development in children, in addition to links with low birth weights and respiratory problems in infants whose families were experiencing housing instability.¹

Yet unfortunately, families with children are a decreasing share of subsidized housing residents, including for housing choice vouchers. In 2009, 52% of voucher recipients were households with children, while in 2022, they made up just 39% of recipients.² Therefore, we appreciate that this bill prioritizes vouchers for families with children.

In addition, family and youth homelessness often looks different than individual adult homelessness. Homeless children, youth, and families must stay where they can due to a lack of alternatives and/or fear of authorities and are often forced to bounce around. As a result, homeless children and youth often stay in motel rooms or double-up with friends or others, hiding them from the community and disconnecting them from assistance. Despite this vulnerability, children and youth often fail to meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s narrow definition of

¹Acosta, Sonya. "Stable Housing is Foundation to Children's Well-Being." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 15 February 2022. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/stable-housing-is-foundational-to-childrens-well-being>.

²U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. "Dataset: Assisted Housing National and Local." Last visited July 12, 2023. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/assthsq.html>. Calculations by First Focus on Children by adding categories of percent of "2+ adults with children" with "1 adult with children" for each year analyzed.

homelessness and as a result, are often excluded from receiving HUD homeless assistance or other supports.³

We note that families who are considered “at-risk of homelessness” by HUD are eligible for assistance in the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act, which includes families in hidden and transient situations, and we ask that these families are also prioritized for vouchers along with those who meet the HUD definition of homelessness.

We thank you for your recognition that where a child lives matters. Neighborhoods are integral parts of a child’s development, and studies suggest that the neighborhood in which a child is raised can impact their neurocognition and brain structure.⁴ A child’s neighborhood can influence their access to nutrition, healthcare, and other local facilities, as well as impacting their physical and social environment.⁵ The Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act helps make neighborhoods with plentiful resources more accessible and affordable to low-income families with children.

This bill supports families in supporting their children. With housing near a high-scoring public school costing approximately \$11,000 more than housing near low-scoring public schools,⁶ housing voucher programs can help enable families to select neighborhoods that can largely impact their child’s learning environment.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of supporting housing mobility for children’s benefit and we look forward to working with you to pass the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act of 2023.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President

³Baldari, Cara. “Child, Youth, and Family Homelessness in the United States: Undercounted and Misunderstood. November 2021. <https://campaignforchildren.org/resources/fact-sheet/policy-brief-child-youth-and-family-homelessness-in-the-united-states-undercounted-misunderstood/>.

⁴Hackman, Daniel et al. “Association of Local Variation in Neighborhood Disadvantage in Metropolitan Areas with Youth Neurocognition and Brain Structure. JAMA Network. May 2021. https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2779445?utm_campaign=articlePDF&utm_medium=articlePDFlink&utm_source=articlePDF&utm_content=jamapediatrics.2021.0426.

⁵Lipinski, Lynn Local Neighborhood Conditions are Important for Children’s Brain Development. University of Southern California Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. May 2021. <https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/news/local-neighborhood-conditions-are-important-for-childrens-brain-development>.

⁶Gaitán, Veronica. “How Housing Affects Children’s Outcomes.” Urban Institute. January 2019. <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-housing-affects-childrens-outcomes>.