

April 17, 2024

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you provide robust funding for programs that assist community organizations, school districts, and public agencies around the U.S. in uplifting and serving children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Addressing the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness is a life-saving investment. These children and youth are at risk for developing physical, behavioral, and emotional problems, and many are vulnerable to becoming victims of sex and labor trafficking. Without help, youth experiencing homelessness often end up in the justice system at a significant cost to taxpayers and communities. Providing a better path forward for children and youth through housing, food and clothing, and access to education is critical to ending youth homelessness.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, administered by the Department of Education, provide vital assistance for community organizations, school districts, and public agencies around the country that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness. The RHYA and EHCY are the main federal programs addressing children and youth homelessness. Through the excellent work of local street outreach, housing, and transitional living programs, RHYA has helped youth experiencing homelessness receive the education, employment, personal savings, and family preservation services they need. With the support of EHCY grants, local education agencies can offer identification, enrollment, transportation assistance, academic support, and connection to basic services. The EHCY program has given children and youth experiencing homelessness the extra support they need to enroll and succeed in school.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support for these important programs. Continued resources directed to children and youth homelessness programs are essential to keeping pace with the increasing needs of this population. During 2021-2022, public schools identified 1.2 million students experiencing homelessness across the U.S., a ten percent increase from the previous school year. At least one in thirty adolescents ages 13 -17, and nearly one in ten young adults ages 18-24, are estimated to experience homelessness on their own each year. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are still under-identified and face significant barriers to school enrollment and education continuity.

Further, most applicants for the RHYA and EHCY programs do not receive funding, leading them not to be able to support children experiencing homelessness in our public schools and turning away thousands of youth due to a lack of available beds. Children and youth are left vulnerable without safe and stable housing, increasing their risk of harm.

We urge the Subcommittee to include continued and robust funding for the EHCY and RHYA programs as you begin crafting the FY 2025 appropriations bill. When States and school districts have the federal resources commensurate with the need, we can prevent and solve youth and children homelessness. Thank you for your consideration of this request.