

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

In every American community — rural, suburban, and urban — children and youth experience homelessness. Public schools reported over 1.2 million children and youth experiencing homelessness in the 2021-2022 academic year, with an additional 1.2 million children under age six experiencing homelessness. At least one in thirty adolescents ages 13 -17, and nearly one in 10 young adults ages 18-24, are estimated to experience homelessness on their own each year. The number of families in homeless shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 16% in 2023, while the number of unaccompanied youth in homeless shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 15%. A national report published in February 2024 reported higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness in late 2023/early 2024 than at the same time the previous year, while less than a tenth reported lower numbers.

To help children and youth recover from the impact of homelessness, we must invest in programs that are uniquely able to identify and serve them. As you consider appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025, we urge you to provide strong support for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education. These are the only two federal programs focused specifically on child and youth homelessness.

RHYA programs prevent trafficking, identify survivors, and provide services to runaway, homeless, and disconnected youth. Through the excellent work of local street outreach, shelter, transitional living programs, and maternity group homes, these vital programs help homeless youth and parents access education, employment, personal savings, and family reconnection services. In FY23, RHYA was funded at \$146.3 million, which equals an investment of a mere \$34 per year per young person experiencing homelessness in America.

It is time that Congress recognizes the critical role of programs funded through RHYA and provide \$304 million for FY25. An increased appropriation would help move our American communities significantly closer to being able to meet the largely unmet need of providing support services and housing options for minors and young adults experiencing homelessness. Only 25 percent of applicants receive funding due to the severe underfunding, but with an increased appropriation, young people will be empowered to thrive as they transition to adulthood.

Additionally, since 2008, RHYA has called for an estimate of incidence and prevalence of youth homelessness to be conducted every five years. To date, due to a lack of dedicated federal resources, such an estimate has only been conducted one time and findings were made public in 2018. A total appropriation of \$304 million for RHYA, with \$4 million targeted toward a regular and reliable youth count in FY25, will help update the incidence and prevalence estimate and ensure that federal programs that support homeless youth are well-targeted and grounded in evidence-based practices. Given the heightened need for services, the \$4 million should be in addition to current RHYA funding and not taken from program grants.

Similarly, the EHCY program is the only federal education program that removes barriers to school enrollment, attendance, and success caused by homelessness. These barriers include being unable to meet enrollment requirements; high mobility resulting in lack of continuity and absenteeism; lack of transportation; lack of supplies; poor health, fatigue, and hunger; and emotional and mental health issues. Nationally, only 20 percent of local educational agencies receive EHCY subgrants due to lack of funding, which limits the ability of schools to identify homeless students, ensure their access to school, and connect them to community support.

While the most recent level of funding for EHCY in FY23 was \$129 million, a bipartisan amendment to the American Rescue Plan provided \$800 million to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including wrap-around services. As a result, the number of school districts receiving direct resources to support homeless students has more than doubled, reaching over half of all school districts. Research shows that not completing high school is the greatest single risk factor for experiencing homelessness, making this additional funding an investment in homelessness prevention. We support increased funding for this important program to \$800 million, which is less than two percent of the total federal K-12 education budget, but will allow newly-funded communities to sustain their efforts to ensure educational success for some of our nation's most vulnerable students.

Investing in a young person's life will enable them to avoid chronic homelessness, intergenerational cycles of poverty, and pervasive instances of trauma. These investments will also allow them to join the competitive workforce and contribute to our economy, experience the benefits of socioeconomic mobility, become leaders of their communities, and participate as civically engaged citizens. We therefore urge you to support these strong funding levels for EHCY and RHYA programs in the FY25 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your support of programs to help solve child and youth homelessness.

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