



# VIRTUAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

An Advocate's Guide on How to Effectively Build Relationships with Policymakers in a Virtual World

# THE POWER OF ADVOCACY + YOUR VOICE

You are powerful — your lived experiences and expertise can help shape the policies that are created. As you live and vote in your elected official's district, you can tell your lawmakers about the issues that directly impact your community and the youth, young adults (YYA), and families that live in your community.

**ANYONE CAN BE AN ADVOCATE.** Building strong relationships with Members of the U.S. Congress is a critical first step in effectively advocating for policy change.

Whether you're defending a cause or supporting the interests and needs of a particular group, you are advocating for a position that legislators want and need to hear about.

Take action by using NN4Y's resources and join us in shaping federal policies so that we can create a future in which every child, youth, and family has a safe place to call home with endless opportunities to achieve their fullest potential. This toolkit provides some different strategies that can be utilized in our virtual world – backed by research and informed by congressional staff.

As a constituent of two U.S. Senators and one U.S. Representative, you have the power to effect change by meeting with your elected officials, building strong relationships with them, and advocating for our collective policy agenda. Engaged and active constituents are critical to educating and persuading policymakers because national organizations have a limited reach. Constituent young leaders, service providers, and passionate individuals can shape policies by influencing policymakers of the importance of our collective policy positions.

**There are several ways you can connect with your policymakers to advocate for our collective policy agenda and ensure positive policies for youth become law. The purpose of this toolkit is to help you do three things:**

1. Build a new or strengthen an existing relationship with your Members of Congress and their staff;
2. Educate Members of Congress and their staff about the local needs and national solutions regarding youth and young adult homelessness and human trafficking; and
3. Ask Members of Congress and their staff to do at least one thing that would advance a stronger national and local response to the prevention of or response to YYA homelessness and trafficking.

Keep in mind, no one else knows what you know or has had the same experiences. No one else is likely to take up these issues and advocate, so you must take the time to build these relationships and advocate for our collective policy agenda. Together, we can end youth homelessness.

## IN THIS TOOLKIT

- Effective Virtual Advocacy
- Strategies For Engaging With Members Of Congress
  - Virtual Hill Meetings
  - Virtual Site And Program Visits
  - Virtual Stakeholder Roundtable
  - E-Advocacy Using Social Media
- Appendix A: Youth & Young Adult (Yya) Homelessness Statistics
- Appendix B: YYA Homelessness in the Context Of Human Trafficking & Chronic Homelessness
- Appendix C: Key Congressional Committees

# EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY GROUNDED IN RESEARCH

---

Across the country, 4.2 million young people and families between the ages of 13 and 25 experience homelessness every year. Because of young advocates and community-based organizations, YYA experiencing homelessness in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities are connecting to vital life-changing programs and services. **However, not every community has services and housing options, and no community has enough services to meet the need. As a result, many young people go unseen and unserved.**

## Multiple Strategies are Effective at Influencing Policymakers

Engaging with your Members of Congress through meetings, site and program visits, stakeholder roundtables, and e-advocacy can help to educate and shed light on the experiences and needs of youth and young adults facing homelessness in America. These are some of the strategies you, your organization, and your local network can utilize to advance our collective policy agenda to end youth homelessness.

## Advocacy And Engagement Strategies: Heart, Mind And Political Health

According to the Congressional Management Foundation, engaging the “heart, mind, and political health” of a policymaker is an effective way to establish rapport and develop strong relationships with members of Congress.

**To engage the heart** is to create an experience or share a story that appeals to a legislator's emotions. Consider what emotions might help influence a policymaker's position on a key issue such as youth homelessness and human trafficking. These can be feelings of hope, urgency, empathy, or anger at how current systems continue to cause barriers for youth and young adults and inspiration to take action.



**To influence a legislator's mind** is to share helpful information to inform and educate them on a key issue, your position and why, and proposed solutions. It is also helpful to encourage your legislator to think about the consequences if solutions are not enacted to address current conditions. Create a dialogue where policymakers will want to ask for more information and take action to enact solutions.

**Get your legislator to consider their political health**, show what's at stake should conditions remain as they are. For example, youth who have experienced homelessness and are reconnected to more traditional education and employment pathways are more likely to become part of the workforce, be taxpayers, and civically engaged voters. It is also helpful to encourage your legislator to think about the consequences. For example, homelessness and its consequences are not just problems for those involved but also for society. The cost to society is high—youth experiencing homelessness experience barriers to becoming contributing, successful family members and community members. If we don't help them while they are young, they may well become tomorrow's chronically homeless adults.

# VIRTUAL MEETINGS – PHONE + VIDEO MEETINGS

There have been many challenges that we as a society, communities, and individuals have faced in this pandemic world where face-to-face and large group interactions have been significantly limited, if not altogether eliminated. In some ways, these changes have made it easier for you to connect with your elected officials- because you don't have to travel or spend money to build a relationship, make an ask, and positively influence the votes and actions of your elected officials.

## Scheduling Your Meetings

If you are a community-based service provider, meeting with Members of Congress and their staff – via a call or video meeting – is a great way to bring visibility to your organization's work, and share information about the services you provide to youth and young adults in their district and advocate for commonsense policy solutions to these local issues.

To identify your legislator, visit:

[www.govtrack.us/congress/members](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members)

- To locate your U.S. House Representative, enter your home address. To find your U.S. Senators, select a state from the dropdown box.
- Once you have identified your U.S. House and Senate legislators, visit each Member's website to find out how to contact them to set-up a meeting. If you don't already have a relationship or contact, it is best to call. To set up a meeting with the representative themselves and not one of their staff members, you need to speak with the scheduler.



## Preparing for Your Meetings

**Determine Who Will Participate in Each Meeting.** Bring together a group of individuals (such as young people with lived experience and front line staff of a community-based youth-serving organization) who can talk about the issue from their first-hand knowledge. Also, if you can include a policy advocate to answer questions that may arise about the policies, that can be very effective. NN4Y team members are willing to join your meetings if we can assist and based on our availability. You can always email us to ask at [member@nn4youth.org](mailto:member@nn4youth.org).

**Do Your Research.** Once you know who your U.S. Representatives and Senators are, visit their websites. This is a great way to learn about the committees that they sit on and the issues that are important to them. This information helps to frame your "ask."

*For example:* If one of your representatives sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee - the Senate Committee has jurisdiction over the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program - you will want to advocate for the reauthorization of RHYA, which is the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (RHYTPA) bill.

NN4Y has compiled all the most recent national research on the issues of youth homelessness and human trafficking for you to use, see the appendix for details.

If you don't already know or have local or state-specific data and research on youth homelessness, spend some time searching for data that you can use in your meeting. Elected officials want to know both the national issue and statistics but are often most persuaded by state and local data and research.

**Make a Plan to Advocate.** Your virtual meeting (phone or video) will not be long. You should plan for a 15-minute meeting (and to be excited if it goes long). We recommend that you send a calendar invitation with a video/phone conferencing option. Congressional staffers will likely call-in and not show themselves on video. That is ok. You can still plan to be on camera, and they may be watching you. Make the most of that brief time by sticking to your topic.

**Send meeting materials in advance.** Due to your meeting's virtual nature, we strongly recommend emailing fact sheets and meeting materials at least a week before the meeting. NN4Y provides fact sheets with talking points for each piece of legislation that we work to advance. Handouts may include data points, statistics, and more on your organization's programs.

**Divide up meeting roles and talking points in advance.** For meetings involving multiple people and stakeholders, we highly recommend choosing someone to lead the meeting to move everyone through the agenda and let folks know when it is their turn to speak.

- Plan and assign talking points in advance.
- Try to ensure a young person and a story to share during your meeting tailored to your ask(s). When sharing personal stories, make sure to connect your story with what you are asking the Member of Congress to do.
- Be prepared to answer questions on the issue(s) that you are raising.

**Try to make a personal connection – connect with the heart.** It can be more challenging to connect and develop a rapport with the staffer and/or the Member of Congress during the meeting, but you should still try. Making a personal connection at the human level is critical to being a persuasive advocate and building long-term close relationships with policymakers.



**Coordinate and share the meeting with the NN4Y Team.** Once you've met with your legislator, share your experiences with the NN4Y Team. Sharing updates with the NN4Y Team on any meetings, events, and communications with your members of congress helps continue to shape policies that impact youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.



# A SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA FOR A HILL MEETING



**Thank the Member of Congress and/or staff for the meeting.**

**Introductions.** Have all of the members of the group introduce themselves very briefly. You should say your name, your organization and role, and where you live and work so that the Member of Congress and/or staff knows you are a constituent.

**Give information about your organization and the work you do.** The Member and/or staff must understand the scope of your operations. Give a quick background about you or your organization and how you connect to the issue of youth and young adult homelessness (i.e., are you a service provider, homeless liaison, or young person with lived experience of homelessness?). Young people can share their personal experiences. Service providers can share more about their work in serving young people at-risk or experiencing homelessness.

**Introduce the purpose of the meeting or the ask.**

- State the purpose of the meeting.
- Stay on topic and present your messages on youth and young adult homelessness briefly and persuasively. Keep your talking points focused and straightforward. Avoid using abbreviations or jargon.
- Personalize the conversation sharing your experience, or the experiences of young people and providers, as well as any challenges regarding preventing and ending youth homelessness in your community. Relating a specific story or challenge puts a face on the issue you are discussing, so it “sticks” with the Member or staff
- Back up your stories with facts and figures found in the Fact Sheets/resources you shared in advance.
- Emphasize the needs around youth and young adults in your community or your state.
- Be sure to prepare a two-minute “elevator pitch” in case your meeting is cut unexpectedly short. This is your quick pitch that summarizes your most important talking points and overall request or direct ask.

**Make a clear ask.**

- Be very specific about what you want your Member to do, for example: “Can you commit to ensuring \$300 million is appropriate to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Program for FY22?”
- If you can lobby: ask the Member to cosponsor legislation, speak out or vote against a bill, sign a letter, or make increased funding for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program one of their top three priorities.
- If you can educate: ask the Member to visit a website, read a report, visit a youth homelessness provider in your community or attend and participate in a virtual event.

**Thank the Member of Congress or staff for the meeting and tell them you will follow-up.**

- Answer questions raised in the meeting or communicate about future issues
- See if they acted on your “ask” (e.g., cosponsorship or vote)

**Grab a picture with the Member to share on social media.** Always ask for permission first – screenshots work for virtual meetings if you and the Member are on video!

## After the Meeting

**Write an immediate thank you.** Write an email thank you to each Member of Congress and/or staff member who met with you. This will create an instant positive memory of you and will work to facilitate further visits.

- Express your gratitude for their time and reflect on a point that they shared during the meeting. Re-share any provided materials, such as fact sheets, reports, or research, in a digital copy format and attach them to the email.
- Find a way to stay in touch. For example, invite them to visit your program during the next recess to see and hear for themselves about the need for and value of services.
- Follow up later to see if they took action you asked (e.g., cosponsor legislation, vote for a bill, increased funding for a specific program, etc.)

## DON'T FORGET



**The Ask.** One of the most common mistakes advocates make is to do all the work of having a meeting with a Member of Congress and talk about the problems in their community without offering solutions. Trust us, whoever you are meeting with wants to hear solutions and clear actions they have the power and authority to take- this is what we call an "ask."

**Remember, your issue is one of many.** Use NN4Y resources to get prepared. In a House office, each staff member might be assigned five to fifteen issues. Senate staff may specialize in a specific issue. Because someone is assigned a particular issue, however, does not mean that person is an expert. Not to worry, NN4Y has what you need. Whether it's a fact sheet, letter templates, or policy briefs, we have you covered.

**The Goal - Build a Relationship.** The requests you make of your Representatives are most effective if you have an existing strong relationship. However, do not let a lack of a relationship keep you from reaching out!

## VIRTUAL PROGRAM AND SITE VISITS

Share your organization's work and programs with your policymaker directly and in real-time so they can see its value and the impact for themselves.

### Invite Your Policymaker For A Virtual Site Visit

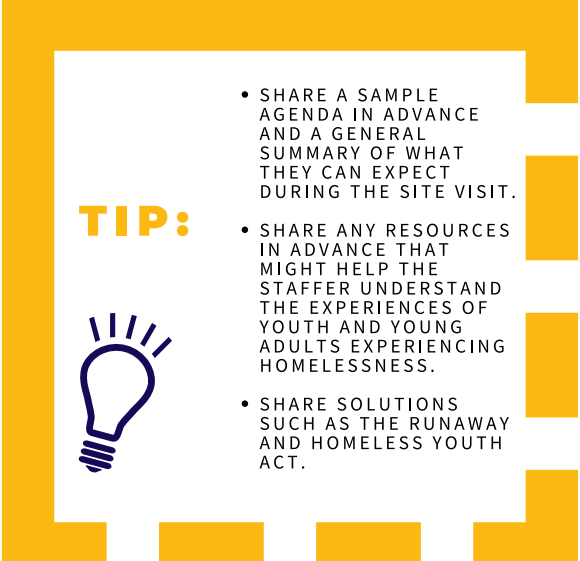
Contact your Member of Congress' office, specifically the scheduler -- the person that makes your Member of Congress' schedule -- and invite them to a virtual site visit of your organization's physical facilities. Inviting them to visit your program virtually allows them to see the services and programs you provide to young people in tangible ways and the community impact firsthand. If your legislator cannot attend, invite their chief of staff (or the most senior staff member you can get) is available.

## Planning for the Virtual Visit

Once you have a date and time confirmed, develop a plan with your team internally to ensure your virtual site visit highlights the different ways that your organization serves youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and/or trafficking in your community. You may also want to publicly share the upcoming visit by developing a communications plan including social media to help promote the event.

**The Virtual Site Visit Experience.** Experiential advocacy is a known and practiced method of engaging decision-makers, such as policymakers, through the senses (i.e., sight, sound, and touch). Policymakers are people first and politicians second.

To influence your legislator as a potential champion of issues impacting youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, think about the different ways you can engage their senses and emotions during a site visit to help them understand runaway and homeless youth.



**TIP:**

- SHARE A SAMPLE AGENDA IN ADVANCE AND A GENERAL SUMMARY OF WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT DURING THE SITE VISIT.
- SHARE ANY RESOURCES IN ADVANCE THAT MIGHT HELP THE STAFFER UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.
- SHARE SOLUTIONS SUCH AS THE RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH ACT.

## Think About The Sights and Sounds

Given the political focus, you will want to show how you have had to retool your program (spend money) to serve young people amidst the coronavirus pandemic safely. Consider the “user journey.” For example:

- You may want your legislator to see boxes of donated items for the youth that you serve.
- You may want them to see your employment and technology center or your onsite health care services.

**Humanize the young people you help.** A legislator may otherwise feel detached and unaffected sitting in Washington, DC (or their home office). Think, what are some items that might help to humanize the young person as an individual and not just be seen as a statistic.

For example, a backpack/bag, clothes, books, or even toiletries are some simple items. These are daily and relatable items that an individual, such as a legislator, relies on on their own life. The more you can bridge the gap to address an “us versus them” mindset, the more likely you will be able to engage your legislator more authentically and powerfully

**What sounds and words might they hear?** Be sure to think of this in advance and prepare. Some idea includes showing your legislator via video a group of youth learning about financial literacy or having a young person share about his or her personal experience--these are ways for the legislator to listen directly to the young people whose lives are impacted by homelessness and who benefit from the life-changing services that the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funds.

**During the virtual site visit, offer to take screenshots but always ask for permission prior.** We recommend sharing these photos using social media channels.

## Getting The Virtual Right

We have all been on Zoom calls or other video platforms that had technical difficulties. You have all had to talk to someone sitting in a dark room or someone difficult to hear. Plan and test out the technology in advance.

### Consider the following:

**Lighting:** You will be giving a tour of some parts of your program over video in real-time. Make sure there is appropriate lighting – not too dark and not too bright – so that the viewers can see everything clearly and accurately.

**Wifi:** You cannot prevent all wifi issues, but you can plan and do a test run to ensure the wifi signal is

strong and stable enough in all parts of the program that you want to include on your virtual tour. Also, have a backup plan. For example, have a cell phone or two that can serve as a hotspot to provide the connection needed to host a successful virtual visit. Test out the hotspot in advance as well.

**Hardware:** Decide what hardware you will use. For example, will you use the video on someone's phone or use a camera on a laptop?

**Test run:** You should do a test run using the same platform, hardware, and wifi that you will use for the site visit. Depending on the platform you are using, you may record your test and watch it later to see where you can improve.

## Setting The Agenda

Always be clear on why you are hosting a congressional site visit. What are the key goals of your visit?

### Some examples of goals:

**Education:** Educate the Congress members and their staff on the value of services that you provide and the federal funding that makes your services possible.

**Advocacy:** Ask the member of Congress to:

- Co-sponsor legislation
- Vote for a bill

- Make a bill their top priority for the year/spending package.
- Make funding for a federal program top appropriations ask for a particular fiscal year.

**Raise your organization's profile:** Use a social media/press strategy – ensuring the member of Congress is fully aware – to raise awareness about the work that your organization does in your community. You can also use this as an opportunity to highlight the remaining unmet need and why additional funding is needed to prevent and respond to homelessness experiences among

## VIRTUAL STAKEHOLDER ROUNDTABLE

A roundtable is a helpful way to provide a snapshot of how your community is working together on solutions to an issue or set of issues such as youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. It is also an opportunity to create an open dialogue to discuss challenges and barriers to uplift cross-sector stakeholders working together in different ways and are committed to ending youth homelessness. You can formally invite a key decision-maker, such as a Member of Congress, to the table as a part of the conversation and as a partner to the solution.

## Planning Your Virtual Stakeholders Roundtable

---

**Determine the Composition of the Group.** Who are the key partners in your community coordinating, planning, collaborating, and serving youth and young adults experiencing homelessness? Your Youth Advisory Board (YAB) should be key planning partners and speakers at this roundtable. Their expertise is unsurpassed, and they are by far the most compelling advocates.

**How can you uplift different voices across sectors as part of the conversation?** For example, consider inviting direct service providers, foundations, corporate partners, local agencies, and youth with lived experiences are a great way to paint a picture of the landscape of youth and young adult homelessness in your community.

**Who are your allies and advocates in the community?** Who can help paint a broad picture of the current landscape of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in your community and can discuss granular substantive information?

## Set an Agenda

---

**Logistics:** Determine a date, time, and web-based platform (e.g., Zoom, go-to-meeting, etc.) for the stakeholders' roundtable. You may want to work with the Congress member's office to find a date and time that works for them to participate.

**Timeframe:** Identify how long of a conversation you will want to set for the roundtable. Be sure to leave time for content as well as questions and answers.

**Agenda:** Tailor the agenda according to your goals for the meeting and outcomes you hope to achieve.

**Determine speakers/roles:** Speakers should have a strong voice, are reputable and respected leaders/organizations in the community, are creating an impact through both their professional contributions and network of relationships.

**Conclude with your ask:** If you have policymakers present, tell them what they can do to help move the needle on youth and young adult homelessness. For example, a commitment from the legislator to co-sponsor and vote in favor of the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act.

**Practice:** In preparation for the roundtable, be sure to schedule time in advance with partners and colleagues involved with planning details of the event. There should be a clear line of communication with everyone involved, from speakers to staff helping with registration. Everyone is an important part of the process.

## Invite Your Member of Congress

---

Reach out to your legislator(s) using the same steps outlined earlier in this guide, such as reaching out via email or setting up a time to speak with their scheduler. **October is an ideal time to invite your U.S. House Representative or U.S. Senator to participate in a stakeholders' roundtable.** You may want to work with the member of congress' office to find a date and time that works for them to participate.

# E-ADVOCACY USING SOCIAL MEDIA

E-Advocacy refers to activities relating to online activism.

According to the Congressional Management Foundation, Senators and Representatives are more inclined to use social media than they were in the past. More than three-quarters (76%) of the respondents agreed with the statement, “social media enabled us to have more meaningful interactions with constituents.” An informed engagement using online activism ensures discussion, visibility, and community.

E-advocacy can also help you to galvanize support within your broader community, shift the narrative on how YHA facing homelessness are perceived, and increase our issue’s visibility so that critical solutions can turn into life-changing policies.



**TIP:**

- PLAN YOUR CONTENT.
- SHARE RESOURCES THAT OTHERS MAY BE INTERESTED IN.
- ENCOURAGE CONVERSATIONS AND PERSONALIZE ACTIONS.
- CONSIDER SUPPORTING AND OPPOSING VIEWS WHEN POSTING.
- PROMOTE YOUR ORGANIZATION’S EVENTS.
- WHEN QUOTING OTHERS, BE SURE TO TAG THEIR HANDLES WHEN POSSIBLE.
- AMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGE! USE SHARED HASHTAGS IN YOUR POSTS THAT OTHER ADVOCATES AND ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS THAT YOU ARE FOLLOWING ARE USING IN THEIR POSTS.

## Five Tips on Using Social Media for E-Advocacy

- 1 Think about what your goals are. The social media tactics you employ should connect with your advocates in a personal, relatable way so they feel inspired to share your content, tell your story, and promote your organization.
- 2 Post compelling, interesting, and engaging content. With an active social media strategy, you can capture legislators’ attention and start a two-way dialogue.
- 3 Pick a channel where you are most comfortable (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram) and focus there – don’t try to be everywhere, and don’t feel you need to learn a new social media platform to be successful.
- 4 Do some research to see who is engaging in online conversations on the issue of youth homelessness. Are there any key decision-makers, elected officials, organizations, or reporters posting about the issue of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness?
- 5 Follow policymakers at all levels on various social media. Identifying your U.S. House Representative and Senator’s Twitter handles and Facebook pages helps you send targeted messages such as thanking them for visiting your organization’s program and sharing photos or thanking them for cosponsoring legislation that you support.

## APPENDIX A: Youth & Young Adult (YYA) Homelessness Statistics

Your Members of Congress will be most persuaded by and interested in local information and data because they were elected to represent the constituents of your state/district. Always use local information and data to educate your members of Congress. These national statistics below can be used to highlight how the issues in your community are similar to what others face and to show the nationwide prevalence of YYA homelessness.

**One in 10 young adults ages 18-25 experienced homelessness over a 12-month period.**



That's approximately 3.5 million young adults

**One in 30 youth ages 13-17 experienced homelessness over a 12-month period.**



That's approximately 700,000 youth

### Statistics

- Groundbreaking research found that approximately 4.2 million youth and young adults experience some form of homelessness every year in America.
- Youth homelessness is just as prevalent in rural communities as it is in urban communities.
- One in five runaway and homeless youth are victim of human trafficking- inclusive of sex and labor trafficking.
- Homelessness for youth is a fluid experiencing with many young people experiencing different types of homelessness, from couch-surfing to sleeping on the streets or in a shelter.
- Half of youth who experience homelessness in a year are doing so for the first time.

### Disproportionate Impact

Specific subpopulations of youth and young adults face a higher risk for homelessness.

- Black youth face an 83% increased risk than their white peers.
- Hispanic youth face a 33% increased risk.
- LGBTQ youth were more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness.
- Young parents—especially unmarried—had a three times higher risk than non-parenting peers.
- Youth with experiences of foster care, juvenile detention, jail, or prison.
- Youth who do not complete high school are 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than peers who completed a high school diploma.



### Lack of Education Plays a Role

# 346%

Youth with less than a high school diploma or GED had a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness.

The lack of a high school diploma or GED is most strongly correlated with a higher risk for youth homelessness. Those who do not complete basic education, are 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than peers who completed a high school diploma.

## APPENDIX B: YYA Homelessness in the Context of Human Trafficking & Chronic Homelessness

### Youth Experiencing Homelessness are Trafficked at High Rates

Unsheltered youth are more likely to fall victim to sex trafficking. According to a 2016 report from the Family & Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), 24% of youth living on the streets exchanged sex for money and 27.5% did so for a place to stay. Covenant House International, an international network of providers of services to homeless youth, found that nearly one-in-five youth had been a victim of human trafficking – inclusive of sex and labor trafficking or both.

Youth who have been victims of abuse are more likely to exchange sex for the basic necessities they lack (e.g., shelter or food). A 2016 report noted that 23.5% of respondents had been abused before leaving home. A Las Vegas youth shelter found that 71% of domestic minor sex trafficking survivors had been sexually abused.

#### Youth Experiencing Homelessness



**One in five youth had been a victim of sex and labor trafficking or both**

The Modern Slavery Research Project's reported that homeless youth have higher rates of primary risk factors for trafficking such as poverty, unemployment, and a history of sexual abuse or mental health issues and that those aging out of the foster care system faced high rates of sex (18 percent) and labor (10 percent) trafficking.

### Effectively Addressing All Forms of Youth & Young Adult Homelessness is Critical to Preventing and Ending Chronic Adult Homelessness

Research has found that homelessness among young people is a fluid experience. Many young people experience different homelessness experiences, from couch surfing to sleeping on the streets or in a shelter. American youth experiencing homelessness is a shifting population of young people who use temporary situations to get by when they cannot stay in a home of their own.

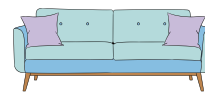
While the concept of “homelessness” might seem straightforward, in reality, it takes many forms in terms of situations, understanding, safety, needs, and duration of events.

Research from cities has shown that a high proportion of their chronically homeless adult population first experienced homelessness as a young person under 25. The City of Seattle found that 43% of the unsheltered homeless population first experienced homelessness as a minor (18%) or as a young adult between 18 and 24 (25%). We will not effectively address homelessness in America unless we focus on young people's resources and investments and intervening early.

#### Range of Youth Homelessness Experiences



**52%**  
Felt Unsafe



**72%**  
of those who slept on the streets or in shelters also couch surfed.



**73%**  
experienced an episode lasting more than a month.

## APPENDIX C: KEY FEDERAL LEGISLATION NN4Y SUPPORTS

---

### **Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (RHYTPA)**

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) received a short-term reauthorization in 2018 and is in need of a full programmatic reauthorization that makes key updates to this program. RHYA funds three pillars of prevention and intervention for youth and young adults at-risk of and experiencing homelessness:

- Street Outreach (SOP): education, treatment, counseling and referrals to vital services
- Basic Center (BCP): temporary shelter, counseling, family reunification services and aftercare services
- Transitional Living (TLP): longer-term housing with supportive services, including Maternity Group Homes for pregnant and parenting youth

Read more about RHYTPA on our [website](#).

### **Emergency Family Stabilization Act (EFSA)**

The current economic crisis and related family stress threaten to create new waves of family and youth homelessness. Even prior to COVID-19, youth and family homelessness were at record levels: public schools identified over 1.5 million children and youth experiencing homelessness. Read more about EFSA on our [website](#).

### **Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA)**

Every community in America is provided with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Homelessness Assistance Grant (HAG) funding for the purpose of addressing homelessness in their communities. Unfortunately eligibility requirements and the programs prioritized under HAG are narrow and not aligned with other federal programs. Further, HAG is not a youth-centric funding stream and communities struggle in implementing HAG funds in a youth appropriate manner because federal policy doesn't require or encourage it. Read more about HCYA on our [website](#).

### **Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA) to Fix the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) “Student Rule”**

Too often youth and young adults who have experienced homelessness must choose between stable housing or obtaining full-time education. Due to a limitation in the eligibility criteria for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, individuals who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness would otherwise qualify to live in low-income housing are not eligible for LIHTC rental units if they attend school full-time. This bill would ensure that youth and young adults as well as veterans who have experienced homelessness can access affordable housing while simultaneously pursuing education. Read more about AHCIA

### **Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY)**

The Higher Education and Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY) is a bipartisan and bicameral bill that will remove barriers to college enrollment, affordability and completion for homeless and foster care involved youth. HEASHFY will require colleges and universities to improve outreach, resources, and policies for homeless and foster youth, including streamlining the FAFSA and eligibility process for financial aid, providing housing options between terms, and designating a single point of contact to help provide valuable services for these vulnerable students. It also requires the U.S. Department of Education to help resolve questions about a student's independence, publish useable data, and ensure its programs identify, recruit and prepare homeless and foster students for college. Read more online.

## APPENDIX D: KEY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

### U.S. Senate

| Committee Name                                                                                                                    | Jurisdiction                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary                                                                                            | Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)                                                    |
| U.S. Senate Banking Committee                                                                                                     | Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA)                                                   |
| U.S. Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)                                                                   | Emergency Family Stabilization Act (EFSA)                                                |
| U.S. Senate Finance Committee                                                                                                     | Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Student Rule Fix                                   |
| U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations – Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee           | RHYA and McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) federal funding |
| U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations – Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Subcommittee (T-HUD) | McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Grant (HAG) federal funding                       |
| U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations-Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee                              | Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) federal funding                   |

### U.S. House of Representatives

| Committee Name                                                                                                                        | Jurisdiction                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor                                                                                           | Runaway and Homeless Youth Act                 |
| U.S. House Committee on Financial Services                                                                                            | Homeless Children and Youth Act                |
| U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor                                                                                           | Emergency Family Stabilization Act             |
| U.S. House Ways and Means                                                                                                             | Low Income Housing Tax Credit Student Rule Fix |
| U.S. House Committee on Appropriations – Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Agencies Subcommittee                          | RHYA and EHCY federal funding                  |
| U.S. House Committee on Appropriations – Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee (T-HUD) | HAG federal funding                            |
| U.S. House Committee on Appropriations – Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee                                 | JJDP federal funding                           |

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

---

- <https://nn4youth.org/policy-advocacy>
- <https://nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/Model-Legislation-to-Provide-Housing-and-Services-to-Run-away-and-Homeless-Youth-NN4Y-2015-For-Advocates-2-25-2016.pdf>
- <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness>
- <https://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/communications-toolkit>
- <http://cqrcengage.com/ancor/file/LKzy1Vnnf2z/Turning%20to%20the%20Press.pdf>
- <https://writingcooperative.com/writing-op-eds-f54af509c76a>
- <http://www.pnhp.org/action/opedresourcesheet.pdf>
- <https://www.nationalassembly.org/initiatives/national-reframing-initiative/using-the-new-frame/>
- [http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF\\_Pubs/cmf-social-congress-2011.pdf](http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-social-congress-2011.pdf)

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH

The National Network for Youth (NN4Y) is a public education and policy advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention and eradication of youth homelessness in America. As the largest and most diverse network of its kind, NN4Y represents over 300 members and affiliates – organizations that work on the front lines every day with young people and their families to prevent and respond to youth homelessness. Together, we envision a future in which all young people have a safe place to call home.

### Organizational Contact

Darla Bardine, JD

Executive Director

[darla.bardine@nn4youth.org](mailto:darla.bardine@nn4youth.org)

202-783-7949