

AMENDMENT FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN and YOUTH

OFFERED BY REPRESENTATIVES JUDY BIGGERT AND GEOFF DAVIS

RATIONALE:

- Children and youth have different needs than adults. All homeless situations, including doubled-up and motel situations, jeopardize their development and put them at risk for greater physical, mental, and economic problems as adults – including homelessness. A different approach to the definition of homelessness for children and youth is therefore appropriate, and explains why other child and youth-serving federal agencies have adopted a broader definition, including the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services.
- Four federal programs are specifically mandated to identify and serve homeless children and youth under a broader definition than employed by HUD. These programs are each listed below, and include the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Head Start Act. It is critical for HUD to recognize children, youth, and families identified by these programs as homeless and accord them eligibility for the full range of HUD Homeless Assistance services. Currently, the discrepancy in definitions undermines the work of schools and child/youth serving programs. This proposal would address this concern while facilitating collaboration between both government and non-profit agencies.
- This approach would significantly decrease the expansion in eligibility compared to the HEARTH Act (HR 840), or in comparison to many of the approaches discussed thus far. It excludes all single adults living in motels or in doubled-up situations. It includes only those homeless children and youth and their families who are identified and verified by these four targeted programs. *The Homeless Children and Youth Amendment would cover at most an estimated 1 million children, youth, and their families who become homeless over the course of a year. This is only one-fourth of the number of people estimated to be eligible under the original legislation.*
- There is a precedent for the approach of cross-verification in two federal laws. First, under the Child Nutrition Act and USDA policy, school district liaisons and RHYA and other shelter directors may certify children and youth meeting the education definition of homelessness for free school meals. This policy was put in place through guidance in 2002, and then incorporated into statute in 2004. More recently, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, was signed into law last September. This legislation allows youth who are verified as homeless and unaccompanied to be considered independent students for the purposes of financial aid. Verification must be completed by a school district liaison, the director or designee of a RHYA program, or the director or designee of a HUD homeless assistance program. Thus, for both Child Nutrition and Higher Education, benefits in one federal program are accessed by verification of homeless status by program personnel in other federal programs who have been given the authority and mandate to do so.

AMENDMENT LANGUAGE:

- Page 5, after line 23 and before line 24, insert new (6)

“(6) A child or youth who has been verified as homeless, as such term is defined in section 725(2)(B)(i) of the McKinney- Vento Homeless Assistance Act, by a local educational agency homeless liaison, designated pursuant to section 722(g)(1)(J)(ii) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the family of such child or youth; and

A youth verified as homeless by the director of a program funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, or a designee of the director; and

A child verified as homeless under Section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by the director or the designee of such program, and the family of such child; and

A child verified as homeless under Section 637 of the Head Start Act by the director or designee of such program, and the family of such child.

- Page 6, line 6 – insert after “situation,” insert the following text: “including situations where the health and safety of children and youth are jeopardized,”
- Page 51, strike lines 16-25
- Page 52, strike lines 1-19