

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2019

September 19, 2019

Dear Colleague:

As students across the country settle into the new school year, we write to ask you to join us in cosponsoring the *Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2019*, H.R. 2001, which would help more homeless children, youth, and families access the assistance they need to overcome homelessness.

Preliminary data from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that public schools identified over 1.5 million homeless children and youth in the 2017-2018 school year, a ten percent increase over the previous school year, and the highest number on record. Over eighty-percent of these students fall between the gaps of federal definitions of homelessness: they are considered homeless by public schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and child care, but not by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As a result, these children and their families, as well as youth who are homeless on their own, are not eligible to be assessed for HUD homeless assistance – no matter how vulnerable they are.

Currently, the definition of “homeless” used by HUD is narrow, and excludes some of the most vulnerable children and youth, including those who are staying in motels or with other people because they have no other option. Shelters are often full, unable to serve families as a unit, do not accept minor youth who are homeless on their own, or simply do not exist. Homeless families are less likely than single adults to stay on the streets and other outdoor locations because they are afraid that their children will be removed from their custody. Homeless youth fear interactions with authorities and exploitation from older adults.

Homeless children and youth move frequently, and are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. Research has documented the fluidity of homelessness for youth, with 72% having slept in three different places, including staying with others or sleeping in a car, on the streets or in a shelter. Families and young people sleep where they can; their living arrangements do not determine their level of vulnerability or need. Another recent study found that high school students experiencing homelessness are at dire risk of rape, assault, suicide, substance abuse, hunger, bullying, and other risks, whether sleeping in a motel, a car, a shelter, temporarily with other people, or moving so frequently that they cannot identify a usual sleeping arrangement over a thirty-day period.

Yet as a result of HUD’s narrow definition, communities that receive federal funding through the competitive application process are unable to assess these families and youth, or provide the assistance they need. Consequently, most homeless children, youth, and families remain invisible in their communities, and are at much higher risk of experiencing homelessness as adults.

The Homeless Children and Youth Act is bipartisan legislation that would ensure that federal programs work as effectively as possible by aligning federal definitions of homelessness for children, youth, and families, and by allowing communities to decide how to best use homeless assistance funding to match their own needs.

Significantly, the bill does not impose new mandates. We believe this legislation is a commonsense solution that will ensure homeless children and youth receive the help they need, while also better enabling communities to stem the tide of adult homelessness by intervening early. The legislation is supported by over sixty national organizations, including those that represent front-line providers who work with these children and youth every day, as well as hundreds of state and local organizations.

If you would like to cosponsor this bill or have any questions, please contact us or have a member of your staff contact Mark Gilbride with Representative Steve Stivers (Mark.Gilbride@mail.house.gov / 5-2015) or Katie Murray (Katie.Murray@mail.house.gov / 5-6576) with Representative Dave Loebsack. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Steve Stivers
Member of Congress



Dave Loebsack
Member of Congress