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The Emergency Family Stabilization Act (S.2923/H.R. 7950): Meeting the Needs of Homeless Children, Youth and Families in the Wake of COVID-19

The Emergency Family Stabilization Act

The Emergency Family Stabilization Act creates a new emergency funding stream administered by the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to provide flexible funding for community-based organizations to meet the unique needs of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness in the wake of the coronavirus. The intention is to provide emergency funding to underserved populations and areas who will see long-term repercussions of COVID-19, including in rural and tribal communities.

Why is a New Emergency Family Stabilization Fund needed?

- **Even prior to COVID-19, youth and family homelessness were at record levels.** The current economic crisis and family stress related to shelter-in-place orders are creating new waves of youth and family homelessness.
- **Families and youth experiencing homelessness are at great risk of coronavirus transmission, infection, and illness -- as well as predation, violence, and trafficking.** Shelters and transitional housing 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 in too many communities. As a result, most homeless youth and families stay temporarily with other people in situations that are crowded, unstable, and often dangerous -- situations that make it impossible to self-isolate, shelter-in-place, or maintain social distancing. Schools, early learning, and service providers report that these “doubled up” situations are disrupting even more readily as a result of the outbreak, as tensions and fear about the virus lead youth and families to be asked to leave.
- **There is a large population of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness that are not eligible for homelessness assistance provided through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),** through which coronavirus-related homeless funding is provided. Families and youth who stay temporarily with other people due to lack of alternatives, or in motels, are considered homeless by the U.S. Department of Education and HHS, but not by HUD. Therefore, they are not eligible for critical HUD programs, such as the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) or may have needs that ESG programs cannot fully meet. As a result, there is a tremendous gap in services.
- **Meeting families and youth where they are - through the systems to which they are the most connected - is the most effective way to stabilize youth and families experiencing homelessness.** Flexible funding to youth- and family-serving agencies would allow them to provide immediate support.
- **Providing supportive services to children, youth and families experiencing homelessness through the systems to which they are most connected, as early as possible, will reduce transmission of COVID-19,** and mitigate compounding trauma and negative lifelong impacts of homelessness - including adult homelessness.

Administration of Funds

- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would administer this emergency program because of its unique expertise in administering programs serving children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.
- Funding would be distributed directly to local organizations that have demonstrated experience and expertise in serving children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, including ACF existing grantees and new grantees.
- Ten percent of funds would be distributed to tribes and tribal organizations, 36% to rural areas, 30% to suburban areas, and the remaining funds to predominantly urban areas.

Which agencies would be eligible to receive funds?

Local agencies that currently receive ACF grants or have experience in serving children, families, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness would be eligible to receive funds, including community-based, faith-based, and culturally-specific organizations.

Which population of youth and families would be eligible?

- Children, youth, and families who meet the definition of homelessness under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, which includes families and youth who must stay temporarily with other people due to lack of adequate alternatives, as well as those staying in motels, shelters, or unsheltered situations.
- Special consideration is given to pregnant women, pregnant and parenting youth, children under age 6, children with disabilities, families experiencing domestic violence, survivors of sexual assault or human trafficking, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA) individuals, or racial and ethnic minority populations. ^[L]_[SEP]

What would family stabilization funds be used for?

- Eligible uses of funds would include:
 - Health and safety needs, including PPE, food, hygiene supplies, and mental health services
 - Housing-related needs, such as eviction prevention, utility payments, motel stays, and housing placement assistance
 - Transportation assistance
 - Emergency child care
 - Communications and connectivity needs
 - Education, training, and employment-related needs
 - The particular needs of pregnant women, pregnant and parenting youth, children birth to age five; unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness; survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, or trafficking, and culturally specific services and supports to meet the particular needs of children, family, and youth from racial and ethnic minority populations.
 - The provision of culturally specific services and supports to meet the particular needs of children, family, and youth from racial and ethnic minority populations.
 - Staffing for outreach and case management
 - Assistance in accessing Economic Stimulus Payments, unemployment compensation, and other benefits provided by federal, state and local governments