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Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole,

In every American community, youth run away from home, are kicked out of their houses, leave the juvenile justice system with nowhere to go, become orphans, or exit the child welfare system with no support for successful transitions to adulthood. To help children and youth recover from the impact of homelessness, and the disruption, loss, and suffering of the pandemic, we must invest in the programs that are uniquely able to identify and serve them. As you consider appropriations for Fiscal Year 2023, 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.

Now more than ever, these children and youth need our attention. While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of all Americans, homeless children and youth experienced significant losses—losses that will linger and require significant resources if they are to regain their footing. An estimated one in four homeless children and youth, which is approximately 420,000 homeless students, have gone unidentified and possibly unenrolled in public schools. This is especially concerning given the academic challenges they faced prior to the pandemic. A national survey of youth providers also revealed fewer beds for homeless youth in communities across the country to comply with distance, and additional COVID requirements from the CDC, totaling only 327 beds in 63 communities.

Public schools reported nearly 1.3 million children and youth experiencing homelessness in the 2019-2020 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 ten young adults ages 18-24, are estimated to experience homelessness on their own each year. Other children and youth are experiencing homelessness with their families in rural, suburban, and urban areas across the country. These numbers are now likely much higher because of the economic downturn and family stress associated with the pandemic. Students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities also disproportionately experience homelessness, compounding educational barriers and trauma.

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. RHYA was most recently funded at \$140 million, which equals an investment of a mere \$33 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 \$300 million for FY23. 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.

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 24 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 supports. Local homeless liaisons, however, help identify homeless children and youth, ensure their school access and stability, provide them direct support service, and coordinate with community agencies to meet basic needs.

While the most recent level of funding for EHCY in FY22 was \$114 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. Research shows that not completing high school is the greatest single risk factor for experiencing homelessness and this additional funding is empowering school districts to identify, re-engage, and stabilize homeless children and youth during the pandemic recovery, including through community-based partnerships. We support increased funding for this important program at \$800 million, which is just 1 percent of the total federal K-12 education budget, to sustain support provided by the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Funds (ARP-HCY).

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 FY23 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.