

Providing Emergency Motel/Hotel Stays with ARP-HCY Funds: Benefits and Considerations

Students experiencing homelessness often stay in precarious, unstable situations over which they have no control. Lack of stable housing can result in high mobility, academic challenges, and [extremely high chronic absenteeism rates](#). According to a [recent liaison survey and report from SchoolHouse Connection](#), lack of emergency shelter and housing remains one of the biggest unmet needs for students and families experiencing homelessness. [Federal guidance](#) specifically allows American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds to be used for short-term, emergency housing (including motel/hotel stays) as a last resort when no other resources are available in order to improve attendance and school stability. Below are some benefits and key considerations for local educational agencies (LEAs) in providing motel/hotel stays with ARP-HCY funds.

Key Benefits of Emergency Motel/Hotel Stays:

Emergency motel/hotel stays can improve school attendance and stability for students who suddenly lose housing, have no safe place to stay, and/or who are so highly mobile that arranging transportation is daunting.

Families and youth who do not know where they will sleep at night struggle to attend school on a regular basis. LEAs that have used ARP-HCY funds to provide emergency motel stays have reported that being able to quickly place families into motels allows them to stabilize attendance and stay connected to families while longer term housing solutions are explored. This is especially true for families who are so mobile that it is challenging to arrange transportation, or to determine families' and students' other needs that may be interfering with regular attendance and academic success.

In rural and suburban communities with no shelters, emergency motel/hotel stays may be the only way to stabilize families experiencing homelessness and keep children and youth in school.

The shortage of shelter beds for families and youth is especially acute in rural and suburban areas. Offering emergency motel/hotel stays prevents families from having to move far away from their children's schools in order to have a place to stay, ultimately disrupting education and increasing transportation costs. Even communities who do have shelters often have waiting lists due to increasing homelessness and lack of other housing options. Motel/hotel stays can keep families in the attendance area while waiting for shelter beds to become available.

Emergency motel/hotel stays can increase access to longer-term housing solutions which ultimately stabilize families and improve school attendance and outcomes.

Many families who experience homelessness do not qualify for homelessness/housing assistance because they do not meet the eligibility criteria for programs funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under HUD's definition of homelessness, families who self-pay for motel rooms or who are staying with others because they have nowhere else to go are not considered homeless and cannot access HUD homeless assistance. However, families whose motel stays are paid for by government or charity are considered homeless by HUD, and are eligible for longer-term housing programs. LEAs that have used ARP-HCY to pay for motel rooms for families, either directly or through a third-party, have increased families' access to more comprehensive homeless/housing programs, and successfully linked families with housing navigators, case management services, and other resources that they might not have been eligible for or aware of otherwise.

Key Considerations in Providing Emergency Motel/Hotel Stays:

1

ASSESSING THE NEED

How many motel/hotel referrals should be expected on any given day, week, or month? Does the budgeted amount to provide motel/hotel stays reflect this need? Given that emergency housing is such a great need, what criteria will be used to determine which students/families will be prioritized for short-term emergency housing?

2

RATES

If providing motel and hotel stays, what is the average rate of local motel/hotel stays, and will those rates increase at various points throughout the school year? Does the budgeted amount account for any rate increases? Are there any local motel/hotels that might be interested in entering into a contract to establish a rate and discount agreement?

3

THIRD-PARTY PARTNERS

Are there community-based non-profits with whom the LEA could contract to provide motel/hotel rooms and other housing navigation services? Some LEAs have found such third-party partnerships to be beneficial and developed MOUs or Professional Service Agreements for placement and motel/hotel stays.

4

INCIDENTAL DEPOSITS & LIABILITY

How will hotel incidental deposits be covered? Can incidental deposits be included in MOUs or contracts? Will LEA credit cards be used? Will students and families need to provide their credit cards, and if so, how might that barrier be removed? Can policies that indemnify liability from the school district be included within the MOU, such as is included in this rate agreement? Are there other considerations around liability to include in MOUs?

5

LENGTH OF STAY

The U.S. Department of Education guidance recognizes that “housing transitions can be complex and take time” and emphasizes that what constitutes “short-term” should center around school attendance, and be determined on a case-by-case basis. What length of stay makes the most sense to meet the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness? If a student or family requests an extension as they await entrance to a shelter or other temporary housing arrangement, how will that be handled? What length of stay is reasonable to establish a connection with local housing providers?

6

PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

What protocols and procedures need to be established to ensure emergency housing can be promptly provided in urgent situations? Will existing McKinney-Vento staff be responsible for making reservations on behalf of individual students and families? Is providing store cards redeemable for time-limited stays at local motels/hotels an option? Does capacity need to be expanded by partnering with a community-based organization or a hotel booking service, such as [Safe Stays by ReloShare](#)?

7

SERVING UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Youth who are homeless and on their own, without parents or guardians, often face the most extreme lack of shelter options. What state or local policies might prevent, or allow, for minors to be placed into motels, under what circumstances, on an emergency basis? What might a motel/hotel need for a reservation for a student under 18? How might an MOU include these considerations?

8

COORDINATION OF TRANSPORTATION, FOOD, AND OTHER SERVICES

Who and how will transportation be coordinated to and from school? Will a taxi service be provided while the student/family is in short-term motel/hotel stay? Will the student/family be provided with bus passes or gas cards to transport themselves? Will students and families be connected to other wraparound services to meet their basic needs, including age-appropriate food?

9

LEA-LEVEL DECISION MAKERS

Who are the points of contact in the business and transportation office who need to be involved in this initiative? What logistical details need to be discussed before providing emergency motel/hotel stays or other short-term emergency housing? How can School Board Members be informed and involved in the initiative?

Resources

Archived Webinar:

Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Through Hotel/Motel Stays


 [Watch the Recording](#)

 [Download the Powerpoint](#)

Sample forms and MOUs:

 [SchoolHouse Connection's ARP-HCY Resources](#)

September 2023 guidance on allowable uses of ARP-HCY funds.

 [The U.S. Department of Education's ARP-HCY Updated Guidance Letter](#)

