

October 16, 2007

The Honorable Barney Frank  
Chairman  
Committee on Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Spencer Bachus  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Maxine Waters  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Housing and  
Community Opportunity  
Committee on Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Housing and  
Community Opportunity  
Committee on Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frank, Ranking Member Bachus, Chairman Waters and Ranking Member Capito:

Children and youth are the nation's most precious resource; we must do everything possible to ensure that they have the resources to reach their full potential. While all children and youth need support to succeed, those experiencing homelessness face extraordinary challenges that warrant a strong, coordinated federal response. As the Financial Services Committee considers the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, we ask you to strengthen current law to more effectively serve our most vulnerable children and youth.

Under current law, children and youth fall through a bureaucratic gap between the definitions of homelessness used by the Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Unfortunately, 63 percent of students – nearly 600,000 children and youth – who are identified as homeless by the Department of Education are not considered homeless by HUD. The HUD definition should be more closely aligned with the statutory definition used by the Department of Education to ensure that our children and youth receive the services they need to succeed.

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2007 (H.R. 840) would appropriately align the two definitions; however, other proposals being considered by Congress would not. The Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act (S. 1518), recently reported out of the Senate Banking Committee, requires homeless families who are staying in motels or with friends/relatives to move three times in one year or twice within 21 days in order to be considered homeless by HUD. This definition would actually cause greater instability in the lives of these vulnerable children and youth. Every unwanted move is traumatic for children. Federal policy should encourage the stability of our children and youth, not require additional instability as a prerequisite for the receipt of services.

Research clearly shows the negative impact on children and youth resulting from excessive mobility. Every time a child moves, their education is disrupted, their peer networks change, and the social networks that support them are fractured. Multiple moves should be discouraged by federal policy, not required by it. Therefore, we strongly encourage the alignment of the HUD definition of homelessness with that used by the Department of Education as proposed by H.R. 840.

Additionally, current federal regulations, as well as S. 1518, set-aside homeless assistance funds to the exclusion of many children, youth, and families. Currently, only about a third of HUD McKinney-Vento permanent housing funds are used to support families. While we certainly support efforts to focus limited resources where they are needed most, we believe that children and youth are among the most vulnerable homeless populations and that communities are best positioned to determine how to allocate limited funds.

Representatives, the future of too many of our children and youth is jeopardized by homelessness. The reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act offers the opportunity to strengthen federal policy to help meet the extraordinary challenges faced by children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. We appreciate your efforts, and look forward to working with you as the reauthorization process proceeds.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education  
American Counseling Association  
American Humane Association  
American School Counselor Association  
Camp Fire USA  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Action Alliance  
City Year  
Coalition for Community Schools  
Communities In Schools, Inc.  
EPIC-Every Person Influences Children  
Family Promise  
Family Services Agency of Gaithersburg, Maryland  
First Focus  
Foster Care Alumni of America  
GLSEN - the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
Healthy Teen Network  
Leadership & Renewal Outfitters  
Long Beach Shakespeare Company  
Making an Educational Difference Foundation, Inc.  
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Center for Children in Poverty  
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education  
National Collaboration for Youth  
National Community Education Association  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Network for Youth  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
National PTA  
Parents for Public Schools of Greater Cincinnati  
Parents for Public Schools, Inc.  
Parents Plus, Inc.  
Parents United for Responsible Education  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
Pre-K Now  
Public Education Network  
School Social Work Association of America  
The National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents  
Voices for America's Children  
YMCA of the USA  
Youth Service America