

***First Focus \* National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth \* National Coalition for the Homeless \* National Health Care for the Homeless Council \* National Network for Youth \* National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness***

**Action Needed: Support the HEARTH Act**

**Background:**

Our organizations are strong supporters of the introduced version of H.R. 840, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (“HEARTH”) Act. This bill, now pending in the House Financial Services Committee, Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, would make substantial improvements to HUD’s McKinney-Vento homeless assistance grant programs.

Among our reasons for endorsing the introduced version of the HEARTH Act:

- The HEARTH Act would align the HUD definition of homelessness with the definition used by the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and family and youth programs in Health & Human Services, thus allowing communities to use HUD McKinney-Vento funds to serve all people who are without permanent housing – whether they live on the street, in an emergency shelter, in a motel, or on someone’s living room floor.
- The HEARTH Act would reverse current federal policy establishing set-asides and bonuses for permanent housing projects and instead allow communities to make their own decisions on how to prioritize the use of federal homeless assistance funding. Restoration of flexibility is critical for returning power to communities to address the most pressing needs of homeless people in their jurisdiction, which vary widely across urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions. This flexibility is especially important in the current foreclosure crisis, where demands for eviction prevention assistance and emergency shelter are soaring.
- The HEARTH Act would ensure that recommendations of many stakeholders are considered in decision-making about how to spend HUD McKinney-Vento funds allocated to their community by ensuring their participation on community homeless assistance planning boards.

**Current Status of Legislation:**

The HEARTH Act will soon be considered in the House Financial Services Committee, perhaps before the end of May. Representative Maxine Waters, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, will be proposing a manager’s amendment to the HEARTH Act. (A manager’s amendment is an amendment proposed by committee leadership that makes a number of changes to a particular bill.) In its current form, the draft manager’s amendment would substantively alter the key provisions of the HEARTH Act highlighted above by:

- Requiring people in doubled-up living arrangements to move at least twice between such arrangements before qualifying as homeless for purposes of HUD McKinney-Vento and other federal programs that use the HUD definition of homelessness.
- Enacting into statute current federal administrative policy on set-asides and bonuses for permanent housing projects.
- Weakening stakeholder participation in decision-making about the expenditure of HUD McKinney-Vento funds allocated to each community.

### **Action Needed:**

Call U.S. Representatives serving your community and ask them to contact House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity Subcommittee Chairwoman Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Ranking Member Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) with the following request:

- Ensure that the forthcoming manager's amendment to the HEARTH Act (H.R. 840) preserves the bill's original intent to:
  1. Amend the HUD definition of homelessness to bring it into alignment with other federal agency definitions of homelessness, without conditions that would require people in doubled-up living arrangements to move multiple times in order to qualify as homeless.
  2. Restore flexibility to communities to use HUD McKinney-Vento funds for the full continuum of homeless assistance activities, without preferences or bonuses that support some activities over others.
  3. Establish community homeless assistance planning boards that include many stakeholders in decision-making about how to spend HUD McKinney-Vento funds allocated to each community.

Contact information for all U.S. Representatives is available at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or by contacting the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121. When you reach the Congressional office, ask the receptionist to transfer you to the staff person who handles housing issues. Leave a voice mail message for this staff member if they are not available to speak to you personally.

Please also urge your U.S. Representative(s) to join their 85 House colleague as a co-sponsor to the introduced version of the HEARTH Act (H.R. 840). A current list of co-sponsors is posted at <http://thomas.loc.gov>, and can be accessed by choosing "bill number" and typing "H.R. 840" into the entry field.

### **For Further Information:**

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