

## **NPACH Policy Paper: The Definition of Homelessness – Support A Real Solution in The House**

Defining who is and who is not homeless has become a hotly contested issue as Congress seeks to re-write the laws governing HUD's McKinney-Vento homeless assistance grant programs – the major source of federal funding to help communities address homelessness. This paper outlines NPACH's position on the important elements of this debate, and dispels misleading information being circulated by other national homelessness organizations.

### **The Draft Legislation Does Not Contain a “Compromise” on the Definition of Homelessness**

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) are circulating materials suggesting that NPACH and other organizations are holding up a reasonable “compromise” that would expand HUD's definition of who is homeless. However, a resolution supported by only one of two parties to a negotiation is no compromise. Thus, the draft legislation does not contain a compromise on the definition of homelessness.

During negotiations, NPACH and other national organizations consistently and repeatedly objected to the language that is now in the draft legislation. This language replaces the definition of homelessness originally contained in the House McKinney-Vento reauthorization bill (HR 840, or the “HEARTH Act”) with a much more narrow definition that covers people in motels if they only have enough money to stay for 14 days, and people in doubled-up situations if there is “credible evidence” that the owner/renter of the housing will not let them stay for more than 14 days. This definition is narrow and arbitrary and would exclude many homeless children, youth, and families. The draft legislation also would permit (but not require) local Continuums of Care (CoC's) to assist children, youth, and families defined as homeless under other federal programs with up to 10% of their CoC funds. However, by not defining this population as “homeless,” even the most progressive communities would have difficulty justifying the use of McKinney-Vento funds to serve them. This is especially true given federal, state, and local pressures to “end chronic homelessness” and in light of bonuses and incentives contained in the draft legislation. Further, by not defining this set of families and youth as “homeless,” this language would make it more difficult for them to receive other benefits that would help them find and maintain permanent housing – such as Section 8 preferences. Consequently, we could not and do not support this proposal.

### **The Right Proposal – The “Homeless Children and Youth Amendment”**

NPACH, NAEHCY, First Focus and many other housing, homelessness, domestic violence, legal, education, and children's organizations support an amendment to ensure that the HEARTH Act contains a HUD definition of homelessness that reflects “on the ground” reality at the local level -- allowing urban, suburban, and rural communities to serve children, youth, and families who are homeless in their areas without imposing any set-aside or mandate on local communities.

The Homeless Children and Youth Amendment would ensure that children, youth (including unaccompanied youth), and families verified as homeless by federal program personnel under the broader definitions used in four federal programs (public schools, Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, Head Start, and early intervention) would be considered homeless by HUD. This amendment would improve coordination between federal programs and help these children, youth, and families access necessary services and supports, including housing. Unlike current HUD homelessness policy, this amendment would not require communities to serve specific homeless populations at the overt expense of others. Despite claims made by NAEH and CSH, this proposal is not the same as the HEARTH Act; in fact, it would define as homeless only a small fraction of the people who estimates suggest HEARTH would have covered.

*We urge your organization's strong support of this common sense amendment, and ask that you communicate that support by emailing Jeremy Rosen at [jrosen@npach.org](mailto:jrosen@npach.org) – no later than Friday, July 25.*

### **Who Stands With Us – Our Partners:**

NPACH is proud to stand with a diverse group of well-known partners in support of the Homeless Children and Youth Amendment. Here are just a few of them – National Education Association, National Network to End Domestic Violence, American Bar Association, National PTA, and the United Way of America. Our organizations understand the importance of a federal homelessness policy that provides local communities with the flexibility necessary to meet the unique needs of everyone who is homeless. Please join us!

*For more information, contact Jeremy Rosen at NPACH, at [jrosen@npach.org](mailto:jrosen@npach.org) or (202) 714-5378.*