

Falling Through the Gaps: Homeless Children and Youth

In each state, between 41 percent and 91 percent of the homeless students identified by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) are not considered homeless by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In other words, the severity of their living situation allows them to receive extra support from school, but it does not allow them to receive shelter from HUD. (See Table 1 for a state-by-state chart of the percentage of students who are considered homeless by ED, but who are *not* considered homeless by HUD.)

Nationwide, as many as 715,238 homeless students fall into a bureaucratic gap between HUD and ED. ED classifies these young people as homeless, but HUD does *not* consider them homeless; therefore, they are not eligible for HUD's homeless services. This is because ED, HUD, and other federal agencies have different definitions of homelessness, which creates a bureaucratic barrier to serving vulnerable homeless children/youth and their families.

The U.S. Congress can close this gap between federal agencies by passing the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 32).

What is the difference between the ED and HUD definitions of homelessness?

ED's definition of homelessness includes children, youth, and families who have lost their homes and are staying temporarily with others or in motels. These children are often referred to as the "hidden homeless" because they are not as visible as adults living on the streets, but they are just as vulnerable and in just as much need of services.

HUD's definition of homelessness focuses primarily on single adults living on the streets and in shelters. Recently, HUD issued regulations that purported to expand eligibility for services. However, the regulations preclude many homeless children, youth, and their families from qualifying as homeless. In order to be considered homeless by HUD, a homeless youth or family staying in a motel or with others temporarily can only stay there for fourteen days and they must be able to prove this in writing; otherwise, they will not be considered homeless.

What services could homeless children, youth, and families access if they are deemed eligible for HUD homeless services?

Homeless children, youth, and families would become eligible for HUD Homeless Assistance services if HUD's definition of homelessness is synchronized with other federal definitions of homelessness as proposed by the Homeless Children and Youth Act. These services include shelter, permanent housing, case management, substance abuse treatment, and more.

Under current policy, public schools are able to provide homeless students with additional assistance to ensure they attend and succeed in school. However, when schools try to help these students stabilize by connecting them to HUD Homeless Assistance services, they cannot do so because the students are ineligible for the services under HUD's definition of homelessness. This would change under the Homeless Children and Youth Act.

How does the Homeless Children and Youth Act work?

The Homeless Children and Youth Act would allow local service providers to refer homeless children, youth, and families to homeless programs supported by HUD. Specifically, any homeless child and their family would be automatically eligible for HUD-funded homeless services if they are verified as being homeless under one of the following four federal programs:

- Education for Homeless Children and Youth program (i.e., school districts through the homeless liaisons designated under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act)
- Head Start program
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act program
- Early Intervention programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

This one change to the law means that if a public school provides a homeless student with transportation and tutoring to help him/her succeed in school, that public school could then refer the student and his/her family to a HUD-funded homeless program to receive other necessary services. Under current law and regulations, between 41 percent and 91 percent of the homeless students in each state are ineligible for these additional services. The Homeless Children and Youth Act would remove the barrier to services that these students and their families desperately need.

Is there more information on the Homeless Children and Youth Act available?

Yes. For additional information, visit the Help Homeless Kids Now! website at www.helphomelesskidsnow.org.

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Table 1. Number and Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth Excluded by HUD¹ Regulations²

State	Total Number of Homeless Children/Youth as Reported by ED ³	Number of Homeless Children/Youth Excluded by HUD Regulations	Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth Excluded by HUD Regulations	State	Total Number of Homeless Children/Youth as Reported by ED ³	Number of Homeless Children/Youth Excluded by HUD Regulations	Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth Excluded by HUD Regulations
National	934,843	715,238	77%	Missouri	15,699	14,363	91%
Alabama	16,287	14,464	89%	Montana	1,445	979	68%
Alaska	4,218	2,546	60%	Nebraska	2,188	1,368	63%
Arizona	30,815	23,728	77%	Nevada	8,841	7,888	89%
Arkansas	8,107	6,036	74%	New Hampshire	2,573	2,213	86%
California	193,796	162,668	84%	New Jersey	6,250	4,343	69%
Colorado	18,408	15,418	84%	New Mexico	9,432	7,660	81%
Connecticut	2,690	1,537	57%	New York	82,409	33,399	41%
Delaware	2,843	1,842	65%	North Carolina	21,019	17,984	86%
DC	854	188	22%	North Dakota	715	455	64%
Florida	48,695	39,367	81%	Ohio	19,113	12,953	68%
Georgia	26,428	23,576	89%	Oklahoma	15,910	12,531	79%
Hawaii	2,966	2,125	72%	Oregon	19,954	15,589	78%
Idaho	4,342	3,626	84%	Pennsylvania	18,204	10,080	55%
Illinois	33,367	27,704	83%	Puerto Rico	4,464	2,862	64%
Indiana	12,252	10,253	84%	Rhode Island	996	516	52%
Iowa	6,631	5,018	76%	South Carolina	10,820	7,665	71%
Kansas	8,452	7,716	91%	South Dakota	1,510	1,180	78%
Kentucky	23,104	18,690	81%	Tennessee	11,458	10,006	87%
Louisiana	25,223	21,215	84%	Texas	76,095	60,572	80%
Maine	1,158	718	62%	Utah	15,702	14,256	91%
Maryland	13,158	11,435	87%	Vermont	780	628	81%
Massachusetts	13,090	7,711	59%	Virginia	14,223	11,411	80%
Michigan	22,189	16,579	75%	Washington	21,826	15,151	69%
Minnesota	9,006	4,934	55%	West Virginia	4,589	2,935	64%
Mississippi	7,499	6,725	90%	Wisconsin	12,029	9,716	81%
				Wyoming	1,021	716	70%

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

² An Alliance for Excellent Education analysis of the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED’s) 2009–10 Consolidated State Performance Reports provides an estimate of the number and percentage of homeless children and youth who are identified by public schools under ED’s definition of homelessness, but who are excluded from HUD’s definition of homelessness under 24 CFR § 91.5 and 24 CFR § 582.5 and verification requirements under 24 CFR § 582.301(b). This estimate is derived by reviewing the number of homeless children/youth who are identified by ED as residing temporarily with others or in motel/hotels, and classifies such young people as “excluded by HUD’s regulations.” The complexity of HUD’s regulations precludes an exact calculation because data is not collected by ED on the complex eligibility criteria required under HUD’s regulations. Specifically, ED does not collect data on the number of children/youth who may meet HUD’s criteria and verification requirements, including the number of children/youth who stayed in motel rooms that were paid for by government or charity (HUD eligible); the number of children/youth who stayed in motel rooms paid for by a parent or guardian (only eligible under HUD’s definition if the family has money to stay for fourteen days or less and no subsequent permanent residence); or the number of children/youth who stayed with others and can provide written certification by the owner or renter that the child/youth can stay for fourteen days or less. Thus, as many as 715,238 children/youth who are identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento education provisions may be ineligible for HUD homeless services under HUD’s regulations.

³ U.S. Department of Education (ED).

