



FIRST FOCUS
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

December 9, 2011

The Honorable Judy Biggert
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Biggert,

I am writing on behalf of First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to thank you for your leadership on the Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2011 (H.R. 32).

As an organization committed to securing a bright future for homeless children and youth, we applaud efforts to amend the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s definition of homelessness to include children, youth, and their families who are verified as homeless by federal program personnel.

According to the Department of Education, there were nearly a million homeless children and youth enrolled in public school in the 2009-2010 school year. Yet many of these children are not able to receive HUD homeless assistance, for the current HUD definition of homelessness excludes people who are forced to live in other homeless situations, including people staying with others temporarily because they have nowhere to go ("doubled-up"), and people staying in motels. The regulations that HUD recently released impose requirements for multiple moves and long periods of homelessness, as well as extensive documentation and recordkeeping, before children, youth, and their families receives HUD homeless assistance.

This legislation would expand HUD's definition of homelessness to include children, youth, and families who are verified as homeless by federal program personnel from four federal programs: school district homeless liaisons designated under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act; Head Start programs; Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs; and Early Intervention programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part C. This would create a streamlined and efficient referral process for homeless children and youth to access HUD homeless services, and provide communities with the flexibility to serve and house this vulnerable population.

The failure of the HUD to allow many homeless children, youth, and their families from accessing HUD homeless assistance has serious and far-reaching effects, including exclusion of these populations from critical services, continued invisibility in community planning on homelessness, and weak or non-existent collaboration/coordination with key systems of care for children, youth, and families.

We are grateful for your leadership in making homeless children and youth a legislative priority, and we welcome the opportunity to work with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley