



FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

March 28, 2017

The Honorable Keith Ellison
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Ellison:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Equal Opportunity for Residential Representation Act of 2017 (H.R. 1146).

As an organization committing to increasing the financial security for low-income children and families, we applaud your efforts to increase access to civil legal services for families who are facing eviction and other housing disputes.

Each year millions of families in the U.S. are evicted from their homes and families with children are more likely to be evicted than tenants without children. Children who experience eviction often face high rates of mobility and unstable living environments that result in negative consequences for their education, physical health, mental health and interpersonal relationships.

Civil legal services and eviction prevention programs help to keep children and families in their home and protect them from the negative effects that occur once a family is evicted. Yet most low-income families lack access to these services. Limited resources are due in part to limited federal funding for the overwhelming need for civil legal services, gaps between legal systems and social service agencies, and lack of awareness for the need for legal services.

The Equal Opportunity for Residential Representation Act of 2017 would start to address the need for civil legal services by creating a pilot program to provide grants to organizations that provide civil legal services by creating a pilot program to provide grants to organizations that provide civil legal services to families facing eviction, landlord/tenant disputes, fair housing discrimination or other housing-related issues. These grants would be equitably distributed between urban and rural areas, with at least 20 percent guaranteed for rural areas.

Increased access to legal services for low-income families facing eviction or other housing disputes would reduce rates of family homelessness and negative outcomes associated with involvement in the civil justice system, as well as help to connect families to services that increase economic stability.

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

Sincerely,