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WISCAP URGES PASSAGE OF THE HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT

The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) has endorsed the Homeless Children and Youth Act (S. 611/ H.R. 1511), bipartisan legislation that would allow communities to effectively utilize federal funding to provide housing and services tailored to the unique needs of each homeless population in accordance with local circumstances.

Currently, most federal child and youth programs, including early childhood programs and public schools, recognize all of the forms of homelessness that children and youth experience. However, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) does not. Instead, HUD homeless assistance eligibility criteria exclude some of the most vulnerable homeless children and youth from accessing the programs and services that they need. By aligning HUD criteria with other federal programs, it would allow communities to identify those most in need of assistance and ensure that resources are used most efficiently to prevent and end homelessness.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were record levels of child and youth homelessness in the 2014-2015 school year; a 34 percent increase since the recession ended in the summer of 2009. During the 2015-16 school year in Wisconsin, 18,592 children and youth were identified through the school district as homeless, of which 77% were staying with others and 7% were in motels – i.e. not considered homeless under HUD’s definition.

WISCAP sees this legislation as a necessary change. Community action agencies throughout Wisconsin provide a wide range of programs and services that help individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency. Yet, these same agencies are often unable to provide critical housing assistance due to restrictive definitions.

According to WISCAP Executive Director Brad Paul, “Since 2001, as consecutive administrations have attempted to “end” homelessness for certain populations, family and youth homelessness has reached record levels in many cities. Homelessness in rural and suburban areas has grown, too, but remains largely hidden and often ignored. Moreover, HUD’s overly narrow priority on “chronically” homeless adults and particular program models forces communities to ignore the urgent needs of other populations regardless of local circumstances. HCYA would finally help give local communities the flexibility necessary to serve homeless individuals, children, youth and families in a way that is appropriate and responsive to Wisconsin’s diverse needs.”
