

April 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

To Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you consider additional “Phase IV” public health and economic relief measures in response to COVID-19, we reiterate the importance of ensuring continuity of services for unaccompanied youth and young adults (less than 25 years of age) experiencing homelessness. The CARES Act made significant strides in assisting communities to address all homeless populations, but further funding and direction from Congress will help to ensure that young people without stable homes are not overlooked in this moment of crisis.

Youth homelessness service providers are already experiencing increased costs as they adapt to school closures, shelter-in-place orders, provide stability for youth in transitional living and rapid re-housing situations, and contingency plans necessary to quarantine potential infected young people. Providers are experiencing and anticipating further increased demand on their services in the coming weeks and months as many young people were previously employed by the restaurant, foodservice, and gig industries, and are disproportionately impacted by their sudden collapse. To address these issues, we respectfully urge Congress to adopt the following recommendations.

Support for housing, emergency shelter, and prevention services specifically for youth.

Unaccompanied youth and young adults comprise an estimated 11 percent of the U.S. homeless population and have many unique needs. To meet the current public health crisis, we urge you to include the following resources and policies in the “Phase IV” relief package:

- **An additional \$11.5 billion in HUD Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), of which approximately \$1 billion is prioritized for services for youth and young adults.** Communities that receive youth-specific funding should include youth and young adult involvement in developing and implementing their community-wide plan. We applaud the significant waivers which accompanied the first \$4 billion for ESG included in the CARES Act. Providing local service providers with the following flexibilities, either

through statute or regulation, will allow additional ESG funding to best be utilized to serve the needs of youth:

- Helping to prevent young people from becoming homeless through short-term direct financial assistance and housing stabilization services;
 - Securing additional bed space, including hotels, to safely move as many young people as possible off the streets and into isolated/quarantined housing as may be necessary;
 - Offering hazard pay and overtime pay to essential frontline workers who cannot shelter-in-place and must supervise minor youth 24-hours a day due to school closures;
 - Hiring surge staff when workers fall ill or must care for a family member;
 - Providing transportation for young people who cannot reach essential services such as grocery stores or pharmacies through public transportation;
 - Procuring and delivering food and regular medicines to sheltered and unsheltered young people;
 - Trauma-informed housing and services for young people who have been commercially sexually exploited (sex-trafficked);
 - Conducting street outreach, to find, serve, and move youth into safe housing;
 - Youth-specific capacity-building technical assistance to support service providers in implementing youth-specific services and coordinate a network of information sharing and support to ensure communities can overcome unforeseen barriers;
 - Securing wifi and other necessary IT infrastructure so that 1) young people can remain connected to resources and continue their education through distance learning, and 2) agencies can secure the IT required to provide remote support and services; and
 - Procuring PPE, disinfectant, and other essential operational expenses.
- **\$225 million for the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) to provide an immediate one-time payment of \$100,000 to every presently funded project, and to extend the award and performance period of all existing Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) projects by 12 months.** Agencies should include youth and young adult involvement in developing and implementing their agency-wide plan. RHY programs are the urgent response system when a youth or young adult finds themselves unaccompanied and homeless. Providers need stability and additional resources; applying for a competitive renewal will sap staff time and inject uncertainty into program planning.
 - Any unexpended RHY funds should remain available to further surge capacity in particular high need areas.
 - Funding should be accompanied by bill language giving flexibility to providers to conduct prevention (including family reunification, counseling, and case management), emergency shelter, direct financial assistance to young people, and housing stability, across all projects.

- Bill language should direct the emergency shelters' allowable length-of-stay to extend from 21 days to 30 days.
 - Congress should implement a six-month cessation of youth aging out of services, and extend the length of stay in transitional living services from 18 months to 24 months.
 - FYSB should be instructed to follow the lead of many States and issue guidance providing RHY grantees the ability to transfer dollars between their RHY-funded programs to better meet rapidly changing local needs.
- **Ensure that all COVID-19 response legislation include language prohibiting discrimination by recipients of federal funds on any basis other than need or eligibility**, such as (but not limited to) age, disability, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), race, color, national origin, or religion.
- **Expanded educational and workforce development supports.**
 - Expand eligibility for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to youth who meet the definition of homeless under any federal statute.
 - Provide flexibility in youth activities under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) to provide greater access for youth experiencing homelessness and extend the length of WIOA services.
- **Reduce future youth homelessness.** Many young people are low-income and hourly workers who will be severely impacted by layoffs and reduced wages and the implosion of the gig economy.
 - Congress should provide emergency rental assistance to ensure low-income youth and young adults who are currently stably housed can stay in their homes.
 - Congress should extend the national moratorium on evictions to help renters remain stably housed throughout this the period of severe economic recession.
 - Congress should implement a six-month cessation of youth aging out of the foster care system.
 - Provide access to flexible behavioral health services in shelters and remotely.

It is critical we protect our nation's most vulnerable children, youth, and young adults in the time of crisis. Unaccompanied homeless young people are exceedingly vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and chronic homelessness if abandoned by society and left to fend for themselves. Thank you for your careful attention to these urgent issues and we look forward to working with you to protect all people experiencing homelessness in this moment of great national crisis.

Sincerely,

Youth Collaboratory

True Colors United

A Way Home America

Heartland Alliance

Funders Together to End Homelessness

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