

Improving Access to Child Care for Homeless Families Act of 2012

The Problem: Homeless Families Struggle to Access Child Care

- 51 percent of children living in HUD-funded shelters are under the age of five.
- Mothers who have experienced homelessness were less likely than their housed peers to have received child care subsidies.
- Women who have experienced homelessness are also more likely to report quitting jobs or school due to problems with their child care.
- Compared to stably-housed families, homeless families relied at higher rates on informal sources of care, such as family, friend, or neighbor care.
- 35 percent of women who have experienced homelessness characterized their child care as unreliable, compared with 23 percent of women at-risk of homelessness and 6 percent of stably-housed women.
- Young children who are homeless have more developmental delays, and more health and mental health problems, than low-income housed children.

Barriers to Child Care Access for Homeless Families

Homeless families face barriers to child care access above and beyond other families in poverty, including:

- High rates of mobility, since homeless families frequently move in search of a safe place to sleep.
- Difficulty accessing off-hours care, such as at night and weekend care.
- Little, if any, income to apply towards child care subsidy co-pays.
- Challenges accessing the documents required to enroll in child care, such as birth certificates and health records.
- Lack of information about how to find, select, and access child care.

The Solution: The Improving Access to Child Care for Homeless Families Act of 2012

In order to increase homeless families' access to child care, this legislation:

- Requires states to describe in their state child care plan how they will meet the needs of homeless families, including through dissemination of information about child care to homeless parents.
- Prioritizes homeless children for access to child care.
- Allows for a homeless child to immediately enroll in care while necessary entry documentation is obtained.
- Collects data on whether the parents receiving child care subsidy are homeless.
- Requires a lead agency, in addition to coordinating with local child care programs, to coordinate with McKinney-Vento school district liaisons and other entities providing services to homeless families in order to increase access for homeless families to information about child care and transportation to child care placements.
- Clarifies that services to homeless families are an allowable use of block grant funding.
- Ensures that co-pay requirements are not a barrier to care for homeless families.
- Creates a pilot program for states interested in pursuing a goal of increasing access to and continuity of care for homeless children, in order to identify best practices.