April 4, 2017

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

In every American community, youth run away from home, are kicked out of their house, exit the juvenile justice system with nowhere to go, become orphans, or exit the child welfare system with no support to enable successful transitions to adulthood. In 2014-2015, public schools identified 1.2 million homeless children and youth; a 3.5 percent increase over three years and a 34 percent increase since the recession ended in the summer of 2009. Thirty-five states reported increases in their homeless student populations between 2012 and 2014, with 21 states experiencing more than ten percent growth during this same period.

Addressing the needs of homeless youth is a critical investment in our children’s future. Homeless children and youth are at high risk for developing physical, behavioral, and emotional problems. Without assistance, homeless youth often end up in the justice system, and don’t have the means to get effective help. They are also vulnerable to becoming victims of sex and labor trafficking, which is becoming a larger threat to runaway and homeless youth.

According to recent data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, being a runaway homeless youth and living in unstable housing are two of the top risk factors for human trafficking. Now more than ever, these children need our attention. Therefore, we urge you to provide strong support for child and youth homelessness programs as you consider appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, provide vital assistance for community organizations, school districts, and public agencies across the country that serve homeless children and youth.

The RHYA and EHCY programs have effectively addressed the needs of child and youth homelessness. Through the excellent work of local street outreach, shelter, and transitional living programs, RHYA has helped homeless youth in education, employment, personal savings, and family preservation. Local education agencies depend on EHCY grants to provide identification, enrollment, and transportation assistance, as well as academic support and referrals for basic services. The EHCY program provides school stability and support to mitigate the effects of homelessness and give homeless youth access to the services they need.

The recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorized $85 million in funding for the
EHCY program. ESSA also made numerous improvements to the EHCY program, including enhanced requirements and training for state and local homeless coordinators, better identification of homeless children and youth, enhanced school stability, and special protections for preschool children and unaccompanied homeless youth. With only 24 percent of school districts receiving support through the EHCY program in any given year, it is clear that resources directed to child and youth homelessness programs are critical for caring for the needs of homeless youth, preventing human trafficking, and improving lives.

Being homeless at a young age also means being at high risk of developmental delays and other challenges that set them back before they even start school. Furthermore, as demonstrated during the extreme cold in many parts of the country this past winter, the needs of homeless youth overwhelm the capacity of existing shelter and transitional housing facilities. As a result, thousands of youth are turned away every year. We have a responsibility to provide a better path forward for homeless children and youth through reliable housing assistance, consistent education, and these life-saving programs.

To build on these efforts and ensure access to these important services, we urge robust funding for EHCY and RHYA programs in the FY2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill in order to meet the unprecedented need for safe and stable housing and supportive services for homeless youth. Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your support of programs to help end child and youth homelessness.

Sincerely,

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

David G. Reichert
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress