Federal Policy Update and Advocacy Techniques: Preparing for Hill Visits and Other Ways to Communicate with Congress

[Webinar] October 18, 2019
1 - 2:15PM ET
About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and technical assistance in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

- Website: http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org
- Newsletter: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/sign-up/
- Federal and state policy advocacy
- Q&A from our inbox
- Webinars and implementation tools
- Youth leadership and scholarships
Presenters

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Objectives of Today’s Webinar

1. Updates on the Current Federal Policy Issues
2. Advocacy vs. Lobbying: Know the Difference
3. Preparing for Hill Visits: Before, During, Afterwards
4. Online and Other Forms of Advocacy
Top Pending Federal Legislative Issues for Homeless Children, Youth, and Families

1. FY2020 Funding for Targeted Education and Service Programs for Homeless Children and Youth

2. Higher Education Act (FAFSA, etc.)

3. HUD Homeless Assistance (HUD definition of homelessness, etc.)
FY 2020 Budget and Targeted Homeless Children and Youth Programs

- **What’s at Stake?**
  - Annual funding for McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth program and Runaway and Homeless Youth program

- **What’s the Status?**
  - The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill (HR 2740) that increases funding for both the EHCY and RHYA programs.
  - The U.S. Senate draft bill includes EHCY increases.
  - The appropriations process has stalled due to disagreements about overall funding levels, but negotiations are continuing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>FY2017</th>
<th>FY2018</th>
<th>FY2019</th>
<th>FY2020 House</th>
<th>FY2020 Senate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program</td>
<td>$77 million</td>
<td>$85 million</td>
<td>93.5 million</td>
<td>$100 million</td>
<td>$102.5 million</td>
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<td>(Preliminary Senate Draft - Not Yet Marked-Up in Committee)</td>
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<td>Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs</td>
<td>$119 million</td>
<td>$127.3 million</td>
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   ● This is slightly over a 10% increase, thus in line with the past two funding bills, and responding to increasing student homelessness.

   ● This is the fully authorized funding amount.
We really appreciate that Congress has increased homeless education funding by ten percent each of the past two years, and hope that Congress will continue to support this vital program in the FY2020 budget with similar funding increases.

Or you could say...

“We really appreciate that Congress has increased homeless education funding by ten percent each of the past two years, and hope that Congress will continue to support this vital program in the FY2020 budget with similar funding increases.”
SHC Resources on FY2020 Budget

- Download a one-pager on FY2020 funding needs for the EHCY program
- Download a chart showing FY2017-2020 funding for selected education, housing, and homelessness programs
- Download a chart showing numbers of homeless children and youth identified by public schools from 2010-2016
- Download a Dear Colleague letter showing support for FY2020 funding in the U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

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

A November 2017 ground-breaking report from the University of Chicago found that 4.2 million young people experienced homelessness in America over a 12-month period. This means that 1 in 10 young adults aged 18-25, and at least 1 in 30 adolescents aged 13-17, experienced some form of homelessness and are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year. Importantly, it also revealed that homelessness is just as much of a challenge in rural communities as it is in urban communities and that youth without a high school degree or GED are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness. Recent data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline shows that being a runaway homeless youth and living in unstable housing are two of the top risk factors for human trafficking. Public schools also identified 1.3 million homeless children and youth from 2016 to 2017, which is a seven percent increase from the previous three school years. Now more than ever, these children need our attention.
Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth (HEASHFY)  
S.789 / H.R. 1724

Removes barriers to higher education access and success caused by homelessness and foster care.

- Unaccompanied homeless youth would not need to have their status redetermined annually
- More entities could make determinations of UHY status (not just liaisons, RHYA programs, HUD programs)
- Financial aid administrators would be required to make determinations for UHY who cannot obtain documentation from third parties (same as current guidance)
- Requires the designation of a higher education liaison (similar to K-12 liaison)
- Requires a plan for housing during breaks and during semester
Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY) S.789 /H.R. 1724

What’s the Current Status?

HEASHFY is one of many proposals that both Senate and House committees are reviewing as they consider the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Senator Alexander (R-TN), Chair of the Senate HELP Committee, introduced a limited HEA bill, S. 2557, that includes some of the FAFSA provisions for homeless and foster youth from HEASHFY. A new Senate FAFSA Simplification bill will be introduced next week.

The House Democratic proposal, The College Affordability Act, H.R. 4674, is a comprehensive HEA bill that includes all of the provisions of HEASHFY, and also additional provisions (a bridge program for homeless and foster youth to transition successfully from K-12 to higher education). The House bill may be voted on by the end of the year.
The ASK

Please urge your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative to cosponsor

S.789 /H.R. 1724, the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth
The more cosponsors a bill has, the better its chances: a high number of cosponsors signals strong support to Committee Chairs and Congressional Leadership.
SHC Resources on HEASHFY

- A fact sheet on HEASHFY by the Congressional sponsors may be found here.
- A fact sheet on how HEASHFY responds to a Government Accountability Office study may be found here.
- A more detailed brief explaining HEASHFY’s provisions may be found here.

Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act of 2019
Sponsored by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Beth Van Scyck (D-OH), and Representatives Katherine Clark (D-MA) and Julie Tymosh (D-MN)

For many working families, higher education can be a ticket to the middle class. Unfortunately, homeless and foster youth face unique and significant barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. In Project search, more than 3.1 million students are homeless and nearly 1.7 million students are in foster care. However, far too many of these students are unenrolled, or off track. The rising costs of college, fear of graduation disabilities and foster youth often lack the support network to help them navigate a complex system of higher education and financial aid processes. The Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act would help resource those barriers and help ensure more students from all walks of life have strong and fair pathways into and through higher education.

This bill would require colleges to do their part to improve outreach, resources, and policies for homeless and foster youth, including streamlining the process of applying for and receiving financial aid, helping students assess financial options to meet their needs, and designating liaisons to help students access valuable support services. It also requires the U.S. Department of Education to help resolve questions about a student’s independence, simplify the FAFSA, publish college data and reports, and resource programs identify, recruit, and prepare homeless and foster students to college. Additionally, the bill would:

- Remove barriers and make college more affordable for homeless and foster youth:
  - End the certification and determination process for unaccompanied homeless youth or youth who are unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of being homeless, and foster youth;
  - Remove the economic and bureaucratic requirement that unaccompanied homeless youth must have their status re-determined every year unless conflict information remains;
  - Retain important documentation paperwork that allows for homeless and foster youth, and can maintain contact with financial aid and other critical support;
  - Clarify that if a foster care youth is at age 26 or determined to be unaccompanied or homeless are considered independent students and can get the bill financial aid they need;
  - Ensure that foster care support and services that help foster youth in foster care do not serve as “income” for purposes of calculating financial aid; and
  - Provide homelessness and foster youth in state foster care to reduce barriers to college attendance due to lack of financial support, particularly when they haven’t had stable residence.

- Support college retention, success, and completion of homeless and foster youth by having institutions of higher education:
  - Develop a plan to assist homeless and foster youth in accessing campus resources during and between academic terms;
  - Communicate the resources and financial aid available to homeless and foster youth;
  - Designate liaisons to assist homeless and foster youth in accessing institutional and community services and to support their ability to complete higher education;
  - Include homeless and foster youth in the data collected by college access programs and identify ways they can better support students retention and success; and
  - Collaborate with other federal agencies, homeless service providers, and school district homeless liaisons to identify, identify outreach to, and create homeless and foster youth in college.

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The Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2019
H.R. 2001 (HCYA)

Corrects long-standing flaws in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) homeless assistance for children, youth, and families.

- Aligns federal definitions of homelessness by amending HUD’s definition so that children and youth identified by one of eight federal programs (including McKinney-Vento liaisons) would be eligible for HUD homeless assistance.
- Requires HUD to honor local community priorities and needs.
- Improves data on homelessness.
Congressional champions seek opportunities to attach H.R. 2001, or parts of it, to other related legislation that may be moving (budget, housing, etc.).
The ASK

Please urge your U.S. Representative to cosponsor H.R. 2001, the Homeless Children and Youth Act

*Note: While there is not currently a Senate bill, we expect one to be introduced soon. So please include this issue in meetings with U.S. Senators, too!
SHC Resources on HCYA

REBUTTING ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT

Claim #1: Without more funding, changing HUD’s definition of homelessness will take services away from the most dire and vulnerable situations: people in shelters and on the streets.

Reality:
- Research shows that children and youth who are identified by other federal programs as homeless, but who do not meet HUD’s definition, are every bit as vulnerable as those who do meet HUD’s definition – and sometimes even more so. They also are at great risk of trafficking and violence, and of becoming homeless as adults.
- HCYA does not prioritize or require communities to serve homeless children, youth and families at the expense of others. Children and youth whose homelessness has been verified by one of eight specific federal programs would be eligible for HUD homeless assistance. This means they would be able to be assessed for services using the same “vulnerability” indices (including age-specific criteria) as are used currently to prioritize people for assistance. It does not mean those children and youth necessarily would receive services. This assessment process ensures that those who are most in need of assistance receive it.
- Without HCYA, even if funding for HUD homeless assistance were vastly increased, children and youth who meet other agencies’ definitions of homelessness, but not HUD’s, would not be eligible for assistance. These children and youth could not even be assessed using the vulnerability indices currently used to prioritize people for assistance.
- The current HUD definition of homelessness results in inefficient and ineffective use of funds. Service providers must resort to using general funds to put families and youth into emergency shelters or motels for the sole purpose of qualifying them for HUD assistance. Some providers designate beds as emergency beds for the sole purpose of qualifying youth for HUD homeless assistance. This is a waste of resources and creates destabilizing and harmful moves.
- The complexity of the HUD program is another source of inefficiency. The HUD homeless assistance program has become so complicated that HUD spends millions of dollars in technical assistance to help communities understand and implement it. Service providers waste precious time documenting HUD’s convoluted definitions. HCYA simplifies and streamlines eligibility and promotes leveraging additional resources through improved interagency collaboration.
- By allowing communities to assess and serve some of the most vulnerable children and youth, future homelessness – and the costs associated with it – will decrease.

- Download a PDF fact sheet on HCYA
- Download Questions and Answers about the Homeless Children and Youth Act
- Download rebutting arguments against HCYA
- Download a Dear Colleague Letter from Reps. Stivers and Loebsack requesting cosponsors.

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Other Homelessness Legislation

US Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), US Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)

Using “emergency spending,” includes $13 billion (FY2020-FY2024) for the following:

- $1 billion for emergency grants, 75% of which must be used for permanent supportive housing (must meet HUD’s definition, and have a disability). The formula for grants is weighted toward unsheltered individuals and chronically homeless.
- $500 million for special purchase housing vouchers. Limited to HUD definition.
- $100 million to hire outreach workers for HUD-defined homelessness

Excludes most homeless children, youth, and families, and continues federal policy priorities that have failed. For these reasons, SchoolHouse Connection does not support this legislation.
Why Advocate?

• You can be the voice for our children, youth, and families.
• You are the expert.
• Constituent engagement is the best way – and often the only way – to change policy.

UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.

—The Lorax
Advocacy: Any activity to influence policy. Includes:

- Educating
- Providing information
- Arguing a cause

Lobbying: Activities that ask legislators to take a specific position on a specific piece of legislation, or urge others to do the same (IRS definition for non-profits).
What If I Can't Lobby?

- **Check to be sure**: be mindful of the narrow, specific definition of lobbying.
- **Offer information to educate** Congressional staff about the impact of proposed policies, but stop short of making a specific ask.
- Find others to **“make the ask”**: National organizations, like SHC, non-profit community partners, etc.
- Act as a private individual. You don’t lose your rights as a citizen just because you work for government.
“Citizen-Centric Advocacy:”
Congressional Management Foundation Report

1. Direct constituent interactions have more influence on lawmakers’ decisions than other advocacy strategies.

2. Congress places a high value on groups and citizens who have built relationships with the legislator and staff.

3. Citizen advocates are more influential and contribute to better public policy when they provide personalized and local information to Congress.

4. Citizens have significant potential to enhance their advocacy skills and influence Congress.
If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?

- In-Person Issue Visits from Constituents: 94%
- Contact from Constituents' Reps: 94%
- Individualized Email Messages: 92%
- Individualized Postal Letters: 88%
- Local Editorial Referencing Issue Pending: 87%
- Comments During Telephone Town Hall: 87%
- Phone Calls: 84%
- Letter to the Editor Referencing Your Boss: 84%
- Visit From a Lobbyist: 83%
- Form Email Messages: 56%

**Legend:**
- A Lot of Positive Influence
- Some Positive Influence
In thinking about constituents and the groups that represent them (e.g., associations, nonprofits, companies), what should they do more or less of to build better relationships with your office and your Member/Senator?

- Provide materials (such as maps, charts or infographics) that visually show the impact on the district or state of an issue or bill: 85%
- Meet or get to know the Legislative Assistant with jurisdiction over their issue area: 79%
- Provide materials (such as research or topics to be covered) in advance of meetings: 76%
- Meet or get to know the District/State Director: 62%
- Organize constituent meetings in the district/state: 59%

Should do more of
How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following? How frequently do messages from constituents include the following?

- Information about the impact the bill would have on the district or state: 91% Very Helpful/Helpful, 9% Very Frequent/Frequent
- Constituent’s reasons for supporting/opposing the bill or issue: 90% Very Helpful/Helpful, 50% Very Frequent/Frequent
- Specific request or “ask”: 88% Very Helpful/Helpful, 59% Very Frequent/Frequent
- Personal story related to the bill or issue: 79% Very Helpful/Helpful, 18% Very Frequent/Frequent
Some groups provide information to congressional staff prior to their meetings. How helpful are each of these elements when provided by groups/constituents before a meeting?

- Specific request for action: 79%
- Impact on district (facts and hard data): 78%
- Local groups affected by the issue: 78%
- Description of the issue/problem: 71%
- Bill number: 66%
- Proposed solution or alternative: 64%
- Key constituents (VIPs) who are interested in the issue: 60%
Common Methods of Advocacy

Meetings
- Group/Individual
- Town hall

Letters
- Individual
- Group sign-on letters

Phone calls
Nuts and Bolts of Capitol Hill visits
(Also applies to meetings back home)

Before:
- Setting up the Meeting
- Preparing for the Meeting

During:
- Conducting the Meeting

After:
- Following Up from the Meeting
Call and ask for the name and email address of the staff who handles the issues you plan to discuss. Typically:

- Education staff cover early childhood, K-12, and higher education.
- Housing staff cover HUD homeless assistance.
- Phone numbers for US Representatives’ offices can be found on [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and phone numbers for US Senate offices can be found on [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

If you don’t reach that person, leave a message and send an email request with the purpose of your meeting, who will be coming with you, and the times that you are available to meet.
• Staff will either reply with a time they can meet, or find another staff in the office who is available at that time.

• Occasionally, if the Senator or Member is in town and available, they will see if he or she can join the meeting.

• **SHC can help:** we have a directory of staff names and email addresses (for the DC office and the state/district office).
Titles of Congressional Staff

By level of seniority/responsibility:

- Legislative Correspondent
- Legislative Assistant
- Counsel
- Legislative Director
- Chief of Staff
TIPS

- Legislative staff are critical; they have tremendous influence. **Good relations with staff are essential.**

- Most legislators don’t do details, but if they commit to an issue, it is **GOLD.**

- It is worth trying to meet with legislators when back at home.
Become familiar with the top issues that Congress is currently considering that directly relate to homeless children, youth, and families.

- Download the SHC two-page summary; you can bring a copy with you, and we'll have them at our exhibit table
- Check out the SHC federal policy page for even more background information, including fact sheets on these bills, and current status
Do a little research:

- Has the Member been a champion or expressed interest in an issue that can be connected to the education, health, and well-being of children and youth experiencing homelessness?
  - For example, trafficking, opioids, child care, mental health, housing, etc.

- Be prepared to connect the Member’s top issue to the work that you do.
Prepare a 1-page document (two-sided) with local or state information that relates directly to the issues on which you would like the Member to take action.

Include local statistics/data if you have them.

Be prepared to give specific example of or story about a problem that the legislation would address, and how the legislation would positively impact children and youth.

If you don’t have time to prepare a document in advance, jot down talking some points, then send information to the staff afterwards.
General Talking Points & Framing:

- Child and youth homelessness is at record levels nationally. Add local or state trends.
- Homelessness creates barriers to educational access and success.
- As a result of those barriers, homeless children and youth struggle in school, and are more likely to drop out.
- Youth without a high school diploma are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness later in life.
- The McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, recently reauthorized and strengthened by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), removes barriers to school enrollment, attendance, and success caused by homelessness.
- There are significant costs in implementing the law.
TIPS

- SHC has a one-page template that you can customize for your community and/or state
- See the Handouts panel to download
1. Start with **brief introductions** (your name, your agency, what you do)
2. State the **purpose of the meeting**, including the specific legislative issues you’d like to discuss.
3. Ask if the staff is **familiar with McKinney-Vento** (or issue you wish to discuss).
4. **Share** your local or state document/information, and walk the staff through the basics: local trends, and challenges related to the legislative issues; how the pending legislation would help.
5. **Close by making the requests**: support funding for the EHCY/RHYA programs; sign on as a co-sponsor to HEASHFY; sign on as a co-sponsor of HCYA
6. **Thank the staff** for their time. Offer to be a resource for them on these topics, and to organize a site visit for the Member when he/she is back in the district/state.
TIPS

- Plan for a maximum of 20 minutes, perhaps shorter.
- Think of the visit as a conversation, not as a presentation – pause, ask if they have questions, be responsive to their interests.
- If you don’t know the answer, let the staff know you’ll find the answer and get back to him or her; you also can refer them to SHC.
- If you are going with a group, considering assigning people to open the meeting, close the meeting, and move the conversation along.
- The person with the hometown connection or the constituent should lead the introductions and the conversation.
After: Follow-up is Essential

- Email the staff a thank you note, attach electronic copies of your local/state information, reiterate your request.

- Offer again to be a resource for them on these topics,

- Organize a site visit for the Member when he/she is back in the district/state, and/or attend a Town Hall Meeting.

- Look for reasons to stay in touch: sending local news articles, reaching out when any of the top three bills (or related bills) move forward in the legislative process.
After: Follow-up is Essential

- Send another thank you if they do sign on as a co-sponsor.
- Ask other local groups/people, particularly those who know/have a relationship with the Member, to follow up on the issue.
- Let SHC know how the meeting went - we can follow up and provide additional supporting information.
Hill Visits “Dos and Don’ts”

HILL VISITS “DOS” AND “DON'TS”
Adapted from the NASW’s Lobby Day Toolkit.

DO:
1. Do present local and/or state trends in child and youth homelessness, as well as local challenges that are directly related to issues that Congress is considering, such as federal funding for the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, barriers to higher education for homeless youth (FAPSA), and problems caused by HUD’s definition of homelessness. Visit www.schoolhouseconnection.org for current topics in federal policy.
2. Do use data and some specific examples from the legislator’s home state or district, and be prepared to share real stories that illustrate both the challenges and how the legislation would address them.
3. Do admit you don’t know if you are asked a question to which you don’t know the answer. Offer to find out the answer and send information back to the office. (Schoolhouse Connection is happy to help you find answers, too.)
4. Do spend time developing relationships with the legislative staff, including sending an email after the visit with electronic copies of any materials that you provided.
5. Do thank the staff for his or her time, and for any actions the legislator has taken that you support.

DON’T:
1. Don’t be offended if a legislator is unable to meet and requests that you meet with his or her staff; legislative staff have significant influence.
2. Don’t assume legislative staff are familiar with the issues, nationally or locally; their schedules and workloads tend to make them generalists, not specialists.
3. Don’t give a presentation; the meeting should feel like a conversation and allow time for the staff to ask questions.
4. Don’t be long-winded; staff are very busy, and you may lose their attention if you are not succinct.
5. Don’t be intimidated; you are the expert. Good policy is based on accurate, compelling information provided by constituents.
Other Forms of Advocacy: Electronic Form Letters

- Online/electronic letters are NOT a substitute for face-to-face meetings: nothing replaces meetings and direct contact for relationship-building.
- However, generating large numbers of PERSONALIZED electronic letters can be helpful in drawing attention to an issue.
SHC’s RallyCongress Platform

- Rally Congress is an online platform that delivers supporters' electronic messages, phone calls, tweets, and letters to lawmakers.

- Simply enter your zip code, edit the template letter, and send.

- You can also send tweets to your legislators and make calls from the site, too.
How to Stay Up-to-Date on the Issues

- To see if your Member has signed on as a cosponsor, go to Congress.gov, and type in the bill number of name of the legislation
- Sign up for SHC’s e-newsletter
- Check out SHC’s federal policy page

www.schoolhouseconnection.org | @SchoolHouseConn
Let’s Get Social

#1
Find us on: facebook
www.facebook.com/SchoolHouseConnection

#2
Join our Facebook group
https://www.facebook.com/SchoolHouseConnection/groups/

#3
FOLLOW US ON twitter
https://twitter.com/SchoolHouseConn
Questions?
See you at NAEHCY’s 31st Annual Conference!

November 2-5 \ Washington, DC

5 Sessions:
- What’s Hot on the Hill(s): Federal and State Policy Advocacy
- Education Leads Home: A National Campaign on Student Homelessness
- Lessons of College Liaisons: Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness
- NC's Focus on Access to Quality Child Care for Children Experiencing Homelessness
- Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles
Youth Leadership and Scholarship - Application Open

Scholarship open to applicants:
- Born on or after November 11, 1999
- Entering college for the first time in the 2020-21 school year
- Who have experienced homelessness within the last 6 years

DC Summit
Leaders in policy, advocacy, and mentorship

https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/youth-leadership/scholarship-program/