March xx, 2019

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

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

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

In every American community, youth run away from home, are kicked out of their house, leave 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. Many children and youth also experience homelessness with their parents, as part of a homeless family. 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 do not 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 U.S. 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 more than 1.5 million homeless children and youth in the 2017-2018 school year, which is an eleven percent increase from the previous year. 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) 2021. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 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.

Investing in a young person’s life will make a difference by enabling them to avoid chronic homelessness, intergenerational cycles of poverty, and pervasive instances of trauma. HHS will also have the potential to support hundreds of additional programs that help service providers prevent and respond to youth and young adult homelessness. RHYA was most recently funded at $132.4 million, which equals a mere $31.50 per young person per year of investment in the life of a young person experiencing homelessness. It is time that Congress recognize the critical role of programs funded through RHYA that serve to prevent trafficking, identify survivors, and provide services to runaway, homeless, and disconnected youth by fully funding RHYA at $165 million. This would help move our American communities significantly closer to being able to meet the largely unmet need of providing support services and housing options for minors and young adults experiencing homelessness in America.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorized $85 million for the EHCY program, and made numerous improvements, 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. The impact of homelessness on education, high school graduation, and proficiency rates of students is notable. Research shows that not completing high school is the greatest single risk factor for experiencing homelessness as a young person, making education a critical intervention. We support robust funding for this critical program to appropriately address the issues facing homeless children and 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. Congress last appropriated $101.5 million for EHCY in Fiscal Year 2020 and we appreciate Congress’ ongoing commitment to increased funding levels for EHCY. Given the unprecedented rise in student homelessness, and the role of education in ending homelessness, we continue to support increased funding for this critical program to appropriately address the issues facing homeless children and youth going forward.

Considering research demonstrating the widespread prevalence of unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness, and the continued growth in family homelessness, robustly funding programs such as RHYA and EHCY is more important than ever. We urge you to support strong funding levels for EHCY and RHYA programs in the FY21 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,

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Don Bacon
Member of Congress