HOMELESS FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN DRAFT POLICY PACKAGE

Who is Homeless?

The term "homeless children and youth"—
*A.   means individuals **who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**;*
B.   and (B) includes—
*   i.   children and youths who are **sharing the housing of other persons** due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in **motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds** due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in **emergency or transitional shelters**; are abandoned in hospitals; or are **awaiting foster care placement**;*
*   ii.   children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is **a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation** for human beings;*
*   iii.   children and youths who are **living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations**, or similar settings; and*
*   iv.   **migratory children** who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii)." (see footnote 1)*

- McKinney-Vento Act most recently authorized in 2001 as Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Introduction

Poverty, and associated homelessness among families with children under 6, continues to grow in Connecticut. Families with young children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in the United States, accounting for nearly 40% of the homeless. [1] This year, there are an estimated 3,000 to 9,000 families with young children who are homeless in Connecticut according to the Federal McKinney-Vento definition. [1] This estimate includes more than the 1,595 families with young children who live in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, domestic violence shelter or substance abuse treatment facilities system. Due to a lack of capacity in shelters, most families with young children in homeless situations find housing alternatives. The estimate of homeless families in Connecticut also includes the thousands of families with young children living in motels, campgrounds, cars and sharing inadequate housing who are more difficult to count (see calculations in Appendix 1). For example, of the children and youth identified as homeless by Federal State Departments of Education in FY2000, only 35 percent lived in shelters.[1]

Inadequate housing and the accompanying instability is traumatic for a family, but particularly detrimental for the long-term health and development of a young child. During the first five years, brain development is at its peak and stability, safety and a nurturing environment are critical to supporting children to build healthy social-emotional behaviors as well as intellectual abilities. For the best outcomes for children in a family, it is essential to not only quickly meet the broad range of needs facing a homeless family while they are in crisis, but also to invest in strategies to prevent homelessness and support a family's stability after a homeless episode.

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[1] http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/who_is_homeless.pdf

Homelessness is a temporary symptom of a larger problem of poverty, often intergenerational poverty. What will it take to build assets sufficient to inoculate families against homelessness and intergenerational poverty? What combination of integrated and holistic supports and strategies will be effective? State government and its ability to connect such resources as affordable housing and community planning, healthcare, early childhood services, adult literacy and job training in ways that meet the complex and ongoing needs of impoverished families plays a vital role in supporting homeless families. The following report represents a deliberate step to working better together across sectors of state government to help identify, align, stage and phase strategies that support families with young children experiencing homelessness.

Plan Development Process

Connecticut's Department of Housing has established a plan to end family homelessness by the year 2022, continuing state and national efforts to work intentionally to end homelessness among targeted populations over time as part of the Federal and State Opening Doors campaign. The non-profit community has utilized public resources and committed additional resources to address the needs of homeless families for many years and developed many effective strategies and resources. Initiatives and bodies such as Secure Jobs, the DCF Collaborative, Poverty Prevention Council and the Two-Generation Council also contribute to helping to identify solutions. All of these campaigns have brought together leaders across the state to work together and address homelessness from different angles. This policy document builds on this body of work, and complements it.

Under the leadership of Connecticut's Lieutenant Governor, Nancy Wyman, and the Office of Early Childhood's Commissioner, Dr. Myra Jones Taylor, the Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet focused their work in 2015 on how the state could better meet the needs of young children experiencing homelessness and their families. Leadership restructured the membership of the Cabinet to include key representatives of the housing community, reconvened the Cabinet in May to introduce the new focused agenda and established a subcommittee made up of a wide range of state agency administrators and provider organizations to create a bold a legislative and administrative policy agenda.

Cabinet members heard presentations from model projects addressing homelessness currently operating in the state to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in meeting the needs of this population of children and families. Over the course of six months, subcommittee members met five times to share the work they were doing, identify ways of connecting their efforts and create a list of recommended policy and practice changes.

This report contains the recommendations created by the subcommittee which will comprise the first phase of state agency actions moving forward to better address the needs of young children and families who are homeless over the coming years. Additionally, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Housing (DOH) and Department of Children and Families (DCF) are finding ways to align policies, practices and resources to create a more coordinated approach to case management and the provision of supports for homeless families. This involves better identification of families, including better data collection, identifying and overcoming barriers to service access, and connecting actual services and supports through case management.

THREE BOLD POLICY CHANGES

This proposal includes major budget-neutral policy changes identified by OEC, DSS and DOH to work collaboratively to better target supports to families with young children who are homeless. DCF is already a leader in developing screening tools to identify homeless families, partnerships, referral and service delivery and has agreed to support its sister agencies and continue to work together and provide leadership in this arena. Collectively, these changes will help create a better coordinated network of policy and social supports to minimize the trauma and long-term impact of homelessness on young children's development while supporting parents to create safe, stable and secure households for their families.

1) HEALTHCARE

Introduce an **intensive care coordination** model **and provide evidence-based community and home models** with community health workers, intensive care management and care coordination, infant mental health services and family-oriented mental health services for homeless families, families at-risk of homelessness and recently homeless families. DSS will explore Medicaid options to achieve this.

2) EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Provide homeless families with **priority access to early care and education** by:

- Making homeless families categorically eligible for the Care4Kids child care subsidy (removing other eligibility requirements, such as employment). (OEC)
- Prioritizing enrollment for children experiencing homelessness in publicly-funded early care and education settings (School Readiness, Child Day Care, Preschool Development Grant, Smart Start, etc.) and prohibiting residency and documentation requirements for those families. (OEC)

3) HOUSING

Create a preference for homeless families for turnover units in the state-administered Section 8 program. [2] DOH will request the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) approval to implement a preference for homeless individuals and families. Twenty percent of all new vouchers issued by DOH shall be offered to persons or families who are chronically homeless in accordance with the current definition.

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[2] Note: HUD, at the Federal level, uses a different definition of homelessness than the McKinney-Vento definition used in Federal education policy. The Department of Housing uses the Federal HUD definition with 4 categories of homelessness. These categories are: (1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution; (2) Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence; (3) Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; or (4) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

COLLABORATIVE INTERAGENCY ACTIONS TO SUPPORT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

State agencies must collaborate to successfully accomplish the main policy goals above. Using the collective impact model, partnering agencies will support one another's implementation of these policy changes. The subcommittee will establish an implementation plan for the identified policy proposals. Initial implementation commitments, regarding identifying families and training shelter and early care and education staff, are included below as examples.

1) **Identify and connect families and their young children who are homeless.**
   o **Use a common screening tool.**
      ▪ Agencies will agree to use a shared screening tool, such as the "Quick Risk and Assets Family Triage" (Q-RAFT), as described below and will explore the ability to share screening data.
      ▪ DCF will have a housing needs assessment, the Q-RAFT or other tool, completed during DCF intake and embedded in the DCF data system (SACWIS) to provide the most appropriate intervention to help families combat family homelessness or risk of homelessness.
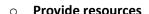   ▪ Expand DCF Careline questions to include questions about the childcare and housing needs of families.
      ▪ OEC will ensure that early care and education programs and providers are trained and screen for homelessness of children in publicly funded programs.
      ▪ DSS will screen for homelessness as part of its eligibility determination for services.
      ▪ OEC will work to increase developmental screenings for children in homeless families, as children who are homeless have much higher rates of developmental delays than children who are not homeless.
   o **Capture data** on homelessness.
      ▪ OEC will include a data field for homelessness within its Early Childhood Information System for children receiving publicly funded early care and education services.
      ▪ DSS will create the ability to flag families for homelessness or at-risk of homelessness. (For example, flag for homelessness or at-risk for homelessness for families using DSS offices, shelters or domestic violence shelters as their addresses, include a housing stability question during intake and modify its P.O. box policy.)
      ▪ Link to the State Department of Education's (SDE) Child Find data system for housing and early care and education needs.
      ▪ DCF's new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is currently under development with an anticipated 2017 release. The system will capture information from the Q-RAFT and additional assessment tools under consideration to measure family needs during the DCF CareLine call process.

- o **Build referral relationships.**
  - DCF will utilize Regional Area office staff to build relationships locally with homeless shelters, homeless service and resource providers, and participate in the local Coordinated Access Network (CAN) meetings to educate, collaborate and assist families with young children in accessing stable housing and access early care and education programs,
  - OEC will ensure that a person with housing expertise is embedded into early care and education School Readiness Councils such as SDE's McKinney-Vento Liaisons or DCF Regional Area office staff.
  - DSS will allow for multiple avenues of referral of homeless families for Medicaid services including pediatricians, schools, agencies, state agencies and CANs.

2) **Train program staff on serving homeless families with young children.**
   - o **Improve programs and develop staff** to better serve homeless families to:
     - **Early childhood providers** (early care and education and home visiting programs): Identify homelessness, use best practices to educate homeless children and support the needs of the parents and young children by referring them to community services such as developmental screenings, job support and other resources.
     - **Housing staff:** Understand the developmental needs of young children, unique needs of their parents, non-housing resources available and best practices for serving a family's housing needs.
     - **Addiction services staff:** Understand the needs of young children and their parents, resources available to support families and children and best practices for meeting their young child's needs while treating their parents' addiction.
     - **DCF staff:** Enhance their understanding of current policies, practice and available resources through partnerships with local CANs, further assisting DCF families with young children to obtain stable housing and quality early care. DCF staff collaboration at the local level involving housing matters will also assist with accessing housing resources for families who receive a Family Assessment Response (FAR-non-Child Protection/unsubstantiated) and are serviced by DCF partner agencies.
   - o **Provide resources**
     - DOH will assist OEC with coordination of information and materials to be available at family shelters, rapid rehousing and transitional living providers.
     - DOH will coordinate with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) on the distribution of trauma-informed care resources to all family shelters.

3) **Seek new sources of federal, state and private funding and realign existing resources to better serve homeless families with young children.**
   - **Funding for housing**
     - o DCF has continuously monitored all "Notice of Funding Available" (NOFA) awards from HUD in order to submit joint applications with the state and local housing authorities to apply for Federal Unification

Program (FUP) funds. These vouchers are provided to families in the child welfare system in which housing is a barrier to reunification of families or to help prevent the separation of families due to the lack of appropriate housing.

- o DOH will continue to offer a schedule of competitive funding rounds for the rehabilitation, preservation and creation of affordable housing.
- o DOH will introduce $30 million in Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supporting Housing Capital Fund in January 2016.
- o DOH will support the continued efforts to diversify financial products that the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority provides low- to moderate-income individuals and families for home ownership opportunities, as well as funding for the rehabilitation, preservation and creation of affordable rental housing.
- o DOH will coordinate with DCF to expand the Supportive Housing for Families program by issuing over 400 Rental Assistance Program (RAP) certificates to eligible individuals over the next two years.
- o Review the state regulations for the Security Deposit Guarantee Program and the Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Program.

- **Funding for other services**
  - o Continue to coordinate with philanthropic partners to fund a Secure Jobs initiative that ties job training with rapid rehousing for homeless families.
  - o **Fund dedicated spaces** in early care and education programs reserved for homeless children. (OEC)
  - o **Create a revolving fund** to provide immediate access for homeless families to Care4Kids funds (through a revolving fund, a shortened application time or presumptive eligibility).
  - o **Create partnership opportunities** with public entities and/or philanthropic organizations to fund innovative early childhood enhancements to housing programs that specifically address the needs of babies and young children, e.g., implementation of the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters and parent-child curricula such as SafeCare, Family Care and My Baby's First Teacher®.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, those who have worked together to create this initial plan will join with the Connecticut Opening Doors campaign to create a Families with Young Children Work Group. This work group will continue the work begun through the Early Childhood Cabinet through a more robust network of resources. Additionally, DOH will organize quarterly commissioner meetings with OEC, DSS, DMHAS, Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and Department of Corrections (DOC) to ensure timely communication regarding all housing-related matters.

Families with young children need homes, families need a coordinated network of services to ensure their housing stability and young children need stable homes and a coordinated network of services to be ready for school and life. State agencies are committed to continued work in this arena.

POTENTIAL LEGISLATIVE CHANGES REQUIRED

The bulk of the policy changes noted in this report can be accomplished administratively, without requiring a legislative change. However, two changes require legislation to accomplish. These legislative changes are listed below:

RELATED TO OEC

- Provide the OEC Commissioner with the authority to create a Protective Services Categories for Care4Kids that would allow families that fall within this category (i.e. homeless families) to be eligible for the Care4Kids child care subsidy without meeting other criteria required by the subsidy (e.g. employment).

- Create a 90-day grace period for child health documentation (i.e. immunizations and health form) required by child care licensing to allow for immediate enrollment of homeless children in a licensed child care setting. *(This may require a regulatory versus statutory change.)*

Appendix 1

Estimates of Homeless Families with Children ages 0-5 in Connecticut (McKinney-Vento Definition)

Estimate Method #1	Very Low Estimate Homeless Families (McKinney-Vento)	Low Estimate Homeless Families (McKinney-Vento)
Number of families with a child ages 0-5 in any temporary shelter[3]	1,595	1,595
For every child living in a shelter, number of children doubled up[4] *"Doubled up" is defined as "sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, or economic hardship."*	In Connecticut 2	Nationally 4.9
Estimated Total Homeless Families with Children under 6 (McKinney-Vento Definition)	**4,785**	**9,411**

Estimate Method #2	Low Estimate Homeless Families (McKinney-Vento)	Average Estimate Homeless Families (McKinney-Vento)
Number of families living in poverty in Connecticut (less than 100% Federal Poverty Level)[5]	30,620	30,620
Percent of children in poverty who are homeless (McKinney-Vento)[6]	CT Rate 8.90%	National Rate 27.10%
Estimated total Homeless Families with children under 6 (McKinney-Vento estimate)	**2,725**	**8,298**

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[3] Includes household data for families with children under 6 passing through annually: 1,132 in emergency shelters and transitional housing (HMIS database) , 399 in domestic violence shelters (CCADV), and 64 in residential treatment facilities (DMHAS- point in time)

[4] http://www.icphusa.org/Publications/AmericanAlmanac/ (Column 1 is CT's ratio based on State Department of Education numbers of children identified as homeless in kindergarten through Grade 12 which is potentially underreported. Column 2 is the ratio based on national rates.)

[5] http://www.nccp.org/profiles/state_profile.php?state=CT&id=9

[6] http://www.icphusa.org/Publications/AmericanAlmanac/ (Column 1 is CT's percentage based on based on State Department of Education numbers of children identified as homeless in kindergarten through Grade 12 which is potentially underreported. Column 2 is the percentage based on national rates.)

Estimates of Homeless ages 0-5 in Connecticut
(McKinney-Vento Definition)

Estimate Method #1	Very Low Estimate Homeless Children (McKinney-Vento)	Low Estimate Homeless Children (McKinney-Vento)
Number of families in any temporary shelter with a child ages 0-5[7]	1,595	1,595
Average number of children age 0-5 per family below 100% Federal Poverty Level in Connecticut[8]	1.35	1.35
Total number of children ages 0-5 in temporary shelter (estimate)	**2,152**	**2,152**
For every child living in a shelter, number of children doubled up [9] *"Doubled up" is defined as "sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, or economic hardship."*	In Connecticut 2	Nationally 4.9
Estimated Number of Total Homeless Children (McKinney-Vento)	**6,457**	**12,914**

Estimate Method #2	Low Estimate Homeless Children (McKinney-Vento)2	Average Estimate Homeless Children (McKinney-Vento)3
Number children living in poverty in Connecticut (less than 100% Federal Poverty Level) [10]	40,689	40,689
Percent of children in poverty who are homeless (McKinney-Vento)[11]	CT Rate 8.90%	National Rate 27.10%
Number of homeless children (McKinney-Vento estimate)	**3,621**	**11,027**

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[7] Includes household data for families with children under 6 passing through annually: 1132 in emergency shelters and transitional housing (HMIS database) , 399 in domestic violence shelters (CCADV), and 64 in residential treatment facilities (DMHAS- point in time)

[8] http://www.nccp.org/profiles/state_profile.php?state=CT&id=9

[9] http://www.icphusa.org/Publications/AmericanAlmanac/ (Column 1 is CT's ratio based on State Department of Education numbers of children identified as homeless in kindergarten through Grade 12 which is potentially underreported. Column 2 is the ratio based on national rates.)

[10] http://www.nccp.org/profiles/state_profile.php?state=CT&id=9

[11] http://www.icphusa.org/Publications/AmericanAlmanac/ (Column 1 is CT's percentage based on based on State Department of Education numbers of children identified as homeless in kindergarten through Grade 12 which is potentially underreported. Column 2 is the percentage based on national rates.)

Appendix 2

Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet
Subcommittee Members – Families with Young Children Without Homes

Name/Title	Organization
Kelly Annelli, Director of Membership Organization Services	Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Tanya Barrett, Senior Vice President	United Way of Connecticut
Rosa Biaggi, Bureau Chief	Department of Public Health
Roderick Bremby, Commissioner	Department of Social Services
Betsy Cronin, Program Director	The Connection, Inc.
Kelly Anne Day, Executive Director	New Reach, Inc.
Steve DiLella, Director of Individual and Family Support Programs	Department of Housing
Laura Dunleavy, Education Consultant	Office of Early Childhood
Anne Giordano, Early Childhood Consultant	Education Connection
William Halsey, Director of Integrated Care Unit, Division of Health Services	Department of Social Services
Sharri Lungarini, Parent	Interagency Coordinating Council of Birth to Three
Emilie Montgomery, Executive Director, Early Care and Education	Community Renewal Team
Kimberly Nilson, Program Director	Department of Children and Families
Magdalena Rosales-Alban, Chief Executive Officer	LULAC Head Start, Inc.
Peter Palermino, Program Manager	Department of Social Services
Arietta Slade, Project Director	Minding the Baby®, Yale Child Study Center Yale School of Nursing
Kim Somaroo-Rodriguez, Program Manager	Department of Children and Families
Kristina Stevens, Administrator, Clinical and Community Consultation and Support Team	Department of Children and Families
Louis Tallarita, Education Consultant	State Department of Education
Lisa Tepper Bates, Executive Director	Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness
Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director	Connecticut Commission on Children