

Definition of Homelessness in the Manager's Amendment

The Manager's Amendment is a compromise.

The definition of homelessness in the manager's amendment is the result of many hours of discussion between advocates on many sides of the issue with dozens of proposals made and numerous compromises. Although the final product does not please everybody, the agreement is the closest thing to a consensus that could be achieved, and any further expansion would result in major constituencies, including many cities and public sector groups, family and child advocates, disability advocates, and hundreds of homeless assistance organizations to vigorously oppose the bill in its entirety.

Under the Manager's Amendment, families who are doubled up or in other precarious situations could be helped, even if they are not defined as homeless.

The manager's amendment also proposes an Emergency Solutions Grant program that will expand services for those who are doubled up or in precarious housing situations. The Emergency Solutions Grant will provide the help that poorly housed families really need to avoid becoming homeless, including short or medium-term rent assistance, rehousing services, security deposits, legal services, or other activities that will help stabilize their housing situation.

The manager's amendment also includes a compromise that allows communities to use up to 10 percent of their competitive funding, and in some cases more, to serve people who are not defined as homeless by HUD but are defined as homeless in other federal statutes. These amounts are in addition to the amounts available for the new Emergency Solutions Grant. As a result, communities could use up to 30% of the funding available, and in some cases more, to serve people who are doubled up or in other precarious situations.

There is a big difference between having housing—even when it involves doubling up with another family—and having no housing, forced to live on the streets or in shelter.

There are many millions of people who have poor housing situations—paying too much for rent, living doubled up, living in severely substandard or overcrowded housing—and these situations affect their health and education. However families who become homeless are much worse off than even these poorly housed families. For example, a study in 20 cities comparing homeless, doubled up, and extremely poor families shows that homeless families experience more domestic violence, are more likely to experience depression, have worse health, and have worse support networks than either doubled up or extremely poor families.¹

People living doubled up have different housing needs than people who are homeless.

The educational needs of doubled up children are similar to those of homeless children, which is why it is sensible for the department of education to include doubled up people in the definition of homelessness. However, their housing needs are much different. Among other things, homeless people have an immediate need for shelter, and some cannot live independently without permanent supportive housing. HUD McKinney-Vento is the only federal funding dedicated to providing this kind of assistance. People living doubled up are much better served with mainstream housing assistance programs, such as the Section 8 voucher program.

There aren't nearly enough resources to serve people who are now homeless. Of the 750,000 people who are homeless on a given night, over 300,000 are unsheltered. Diverting more resources to serve doubled up people would make that problem even worse.

The people harmed most by an expanded definition would be families with children who are currently defined as homeless.

The providers who would change their behavior as a result of an expanded definition are primarily family providers, some of whom would serve fewer of the people they are serving now in order to serve doubled up families. The families who would lose out are those who meet the current definition because they are living in cars, in abandoned buildings, in shelters, in ministorage lockers, or who ride buses or subways all night.

¹ Fertig, Angela R., and David Reingold. Forthcoming. "The Characteristics and Causes of Homelessness among at Risk Families with Children in Twenty American Cities." *Social Service Review* 82 (2).

