

September 24, 2009

Chairman Max Baucus
U.S. Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

The National Alliance to End Homelessness and The National Center on Family Homelessness thank you for including a provision to expand Early Home Visiting to families with young children in America's Healthy Future Act of 2009.

Early childhood home visitation programs can be particularly beneficial for the many young children who experience homelessness in our nation. The recent Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress found that 157,000 children age five or under resided in shelter at some point over a one year period and 32,000 of these children had not reached their first birthday. A much greater number of children lack permanent housing and are moving from one unstable situation to the next. The National Center on Family Homelessness found that 1 in 50 children were unsheltered, in homeless shelter programs, motels or in doubled up situations during the course of a year using data collected by U.S. Department of Education school district-based homeless liaisons. On any given day, tens of thousands of children under age 5 do not have a home to call their own, are in a homeless shelter program or, worse, residing in a location unfit for human habitation.

Homelessness is marked by many upheavals and a great deal of stress in the lives of children. Families typically move from one unstable situation to another before entering the homeless shelter system. Families may also move to a number of different shelter programs before re-accessing permanent housing in the community. Compared to the general population, children experiencing homelessness are sicker and hungrier and have a higher rate of emotional and behavioral problems. A majority have been exposed to violence. As a result, children experiencing homelessness are four times as likely to have delayed development. The inherent instability that accompanies homelessness can undermine a child's sense of security while overwhelming parents, also threatening the well-being and development of children.

The provision to expand Home Visitation programs can improve the outcomes for this vulnerable population. We have seen young children and their parents respond positively to early education home visiting programs. Recognizing the disconnect between services to support young mothers with young children and family homelessness programs, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funded the *Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers Initiative* in 2006. The Initiative is specifically designed to facilitate partnerships between local child development and homeless and housing service

organizations to provide integrated services to improve the housing, health, and development of homeless and at-risk young children and their young mothers. An intended outcome of the Initiative is to identify promising strategies that can be replicated nationally.

Among the emerging findings of the project is the important role that housing plays in reducing mothers' stress and, evidently, children's. Mothers reported that having their own home seemed to lighten the load on young children. One mother reported that her children are "smiling more" and another reported her child is worrying less and is acting more age-appropriate and interested in play. Addressing the need for family strengthening and child development services along with stable housing facilitates a strong platform for young children and their families to thrive.

Home visitation can improve the outcomes for this vulnerable population. We would welcome the opportunity to work with your office to explore how to promote the use of early education home visiting programs to serve young, homeless children experiencing or at risk of homelessness and when possible, to collaborate with organizations who can help address the families' need for stable housing. Thank you for your important leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Ellen Bassuk, MD, President
The National Center on Family Homelessness



Nan Roman, President
National Alliance to End Homelessness