



May 29, 2014

Dear Colleague:

May is National Foster Care Month, a time for our Nation to reaffirm its commitment to America's children. Last year, roughly 200,000 young people entered into foster care because of abuse and/or neglect. Inadequate housing was a factor in many of these cases. In fact, every year, inadequate housing contributes to the removal of 22,000 children from their families. This can have lasting consequences for young people.

Research shows that children facing housing instability, homelessness, and poverty are more likely to be involved in the child welfare system. When a family is living in distressed conditions or experiencing homelessness, it can affect their ability to care for their kids, and it can have a negative impact on the ability of kids to learn in school, maintain good health, and keep their hope for the future. With this in mind, it is critical that we do everything we can to provide them with the safe and stable housing they need to succeed.

To achieve this goal, it is critical that all of us—Federal agencies, public housing authorities and multifamily housing owners, Continuums of Care, and local child welfare agencies—closely collaborate with each other. The needs of families are diverse. Some need intensive support and long-term access to appropriate services. Others simply need financial assistance to care for their children. In many cases, neither child welfare agencies nor programs aimed at preventing homelessness can meet all of these needs alone.

The programs authorized by title IV-B of the Social Security Act provide a limited pool of funds to prevent the removal of children from their homes or to help those in foster care reunite with their families. In general, states use title IV-B funds for short-term, crisis-driven interventions and services, which may include one-time assistance with housing, utilities, or other related housing costs. For many of these families, gaining access to reliable housing supports, such as provided through HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or public housing programs, can provide the key to a stable future.

We know that families are more likely to remain housed if they have a targeted service paired with appropriate housing that meets their needs. Through close collaboration, child welfare agencies and public housing agencies can provide these paired services to keep families and youth in safe and appropriate housing. One example is HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP).

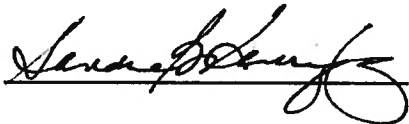
A special purpose voucher program, FUP demonstrates how local partnerships can address housing needs for families using child welfare services and youth aging out of foster care. Similarly, public housing agencies and child welfare agencies can come together to establish a local preference for families referred by child welfare and couple this housing assistance with

supportive services. Child welfare agencies can also collaborate with private multifamily housing owners that provide HUD-assisted rental assistance, or by partnering with state or local housing agencies to develop local affordable housing through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and HUD's HOME Investment Partnerships Program. Together, child welfare agencies, housing agencies, and Continuums of Care can create an array of housing interventions to serve these children, youth, and families better.

Currently, The Children's Bureau has two sets of grants aimed at providing more information about successful housing interventions for these vulnerable families. One develops strategies for homeless youth and the other targets homeless families. HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families will continue working together to develop and disseminate information about promising practices and strategies for serving this population.

*Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness* recognizes the critical needs of youth and families by designating them as two priority homeless populations and setting the goal of ending homelessness for these groups by year 2020. The plan also stresses the importance of governmental collaboration at all levels in order to address and end family and youth homelessness.

National Foster Care Month is a reminder of our obligation to help children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in the system. By working together, and identifying new ways to serve this population, we can ensure that every child in America has an opportunity to succeed.



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