

December 1, 2015

Senator Tim Kaine
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Brian Schatz
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Kaine, Collins, Murray and Schatz,

We are writing in support of S. 2289, the Family Unification Preservation and Modernization Act of 2015 that was recently introduced. S. 2289 is critical to improving access to housing resources and supportive services for high-need families and youth at risk of becoming homeless. Further, S. 2289 promotes interagency coordination to improve program delivery and outcomes for families and transition-age youth.

The Family Unification Program (FUP) provides housing assistance vouchers to families that are involved with child welfare and youth aging out of the foster care system. For families that are involved with child welfare, access to housing assistance can make the difference of whether a family is separated or kept intact. Research demonstrates that separating children from their parents has detrimental short- and long-term consequences on childhood and adolescent development. Further, young adults that have been involved with foster care are at higher-risk of falling into homelessness later in life. In fact, one out of five young adults that age out fall into homelessness in the year following emancipation. The changes that S. 2289 proposes will make the FUP program more effective for serving both families and youth that at high-risk of long-term housing instability or homelessness.

Housing assistance creates a stable platform for families who are at risk of separation or in the preservation process to access appropriate family-centered services they need to succeed and stay together. The bill promotes housing first principles to be utilized by PHAs and PWCA's in order to reduce barriers to housing that many needy families face. The bill also provides families quicker access to housing to allow them to start the process of stabilization. Further, the bill would require HUD and HHS to write joint guidance that would improve coordination of resources for families, ensure that higher-need families are gaining access to housing assistance, and align local program goals to improve family preservation and reunification.

The youth-FUP voucher program also creates an opportunity to reduce lapses in housing for youth aging out of the foster care during a critical transition period in their young adult lives. S. 2289 makes key changes to FUP vouchers to make them a more effective resource for transition-age youth. Extending the program's time limit will give those young adults who require additional support the time they need to successfully transition to the next stage of their lives. Further, modifying the age eligibility will improve access to housing assistance for those young adults living in states that have extended foster care. Finally, the bill allows young adults who are within 90 day of leaving foster care to access housing assistance, which will reduce gaps in housing for this population.

The Family Unification, Preservation and Modernization Act will help some of the most vulnerable families and youth to use housing as a platform to stabilize their lives and reach their full potential. We look forward to working with you and your staff to enact this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

BoysTown
CASA of New Orleans
Child Welfare League of America
Council of Large Public Housing Agencies (CLPHA)
CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing)
First Focus
Foster Care Alumni of America
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights Projects for Girls (Rights4Girls)
Lutheran Services in America
National Alliance to End Homelessness
North American Council on Adoptable Children
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Center for Housing and Child Welfare
National Center on Shared Leadership®
National Crittenton Foundation
National Foster Parent Association
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
Parents Anonymous® Inc.
PFLAG National
ReStart, Inc.
Strengthening Families All Around the World
Youth Villages