

Hello. I am Sonia Pitz. I am the Region 3 Coordinator for the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program. In region 3 we say ECYEH!

As my fellow colleagues have said, I, too, would like to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to talk to you about this important topic, students experiencing homelessness as defined by the McKinney Vento Act.

As Brian and Alyssa have already explained, we have data to back up the need for services to these students. We have data that shows the increasing number of students identified as experiencing homeless under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act definition. It's important to specifically reference the source of this definition because Subtitle VII-B provides a definition that is more true to the reality faced by students than HUD's definition. One of the largest identified percentages of students' nighttime status is living doubled up (close to 76%), which is not part of HUD's definition.

But I am not here today to discuss that.

I am here today to give voice to the almost 47 THOUSAND students identified in the 2022-2023 school year. To remind you that behind every number is a face. A true story. A life being lived that we may not otherwise notice.

I would like to read a story a student wrote. The only prompt I gave this student was, "Do you like school? Why or why not"

Story...

The story I just read to you is word for word as written by a 10 - year- old. Admittedly, this student knows who I am and what I do. I say this to point out that a traditional student may have answered differently. A traditional student may not have said why the principal was not funny. A traditional student may not have mentioned their living situation. A traditional student doesn't have to worry about going to the same school.

When the Education for Students Experiencing Homelessness Awareness Week started 11 years ago, I was 18 years into trying to eliminate my job. People did not know what the McKinney-Vento Act was or why it is so important.

11 years later, we still present at schools, for community organizations, businesses, and anyone who will listen, to ensure that people know this exists. That we have students, children, who experience homelessness.

That these children need to go to school. And there are times when barriers to attendance make that difficult to impossible.

There is no other federal program that has the responsibility for and the expertise in finding, engaging, and serving these identified students, and upholding their educational rights. Local

education liaisons help identify homeless children and youth, ensure school access and stability, provide direct services, and coordinate with community agencies to meet basic needs.

I am very lucky to work with great school districts who have assigned Education Liaisons willing to learn.

Willing to do what is mandated. And I know that there is still pushback.

Pushback due to judgements.

Judgements like money is being wasted because people make poor decisions.

Why should we reward these parents, or unaccompanied homeless youth, by providing free lunch.

Transportation to school AND extracurricular activities

Consistency and stability have been proven to show a student is better able to be PRESENT in their school day. Consistency and stability are crucial for ensuring student success, whether that be acing their homework or finishing the coursework required for graduation

Consistency and stability in school provide relief from trauma endured by students outside the classroom

Education is important. We can all agree. Let us continue to provide the services we need to provide, so that children can be allowed to be children. Let the adults figure out the adult stuff. Let the students have the full experience of school, of participating in extra - curricular activities, field trips, school dances.

Let us continue to increase the awareness of the importance of McKinney Vento.

Thank you again for your time and your attention.