

10 July 2019

Babs Roberts
Director, Community Services Division
Economic Services Administration
Department of Social and Human Services

Dear Director Roberts,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to urge you to adopt a definition of homelessness that is inclusive of couch surfing and doubling-up for time limit extensions for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) established in the Washington Administrative Code rulemaking process for [Second Substitute House Bill 1603 \(2SHB 1603\)](#).

Child and family homelessness takes many forms. For many families, their experience of homelessness includes couch surfing and/or doubling-up with friends or family when they have nowhere else to go. A family repeatedly moving from couch to couch or sleeping many to a room -- without a consistent address or any form of tenant protections -- in order to avoid sleeping outside cannot reasonably be considered stably housed. This experience of homelessness should be recognized in the new rules adopted for purposes of TANF homelessness time limit extensions as outlined by 2SHB 1603.

Furthermore, to best support children and families experiencing homelessness, it is critical that our state's support services work in alignment to meet the various needs of families. By adopting couch surfing and/or doubling-up in the definition of homelessness for TANF time limits, our state would strategically align TANF with other critical support services, such as those offered to public school children as outlined by the McKinney-Vento Act and Washington state's Office of Homeless Youth in instances in which the head of household is under age 25.

Ensuring this inclusive definition of homelessness will ensure more resources are leveraged to support the academic achievement of public school students experiencing homelessness. An [analysis of Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction data by Schoolhouse Washington](#) demonstrates that students that are doubled-up have similarly poor academic outcomes of those living in hotels/motels, shelters, and those who are unsheltered. TANF's cash and supportive services can provide critical support to these students, providing much-needed stability and providing an opportunity to boost their chance at academic success.

We are providing our recommended language for adoption in the included addendum, and welcome the opportunity for further discussion about this important issue.

We appreciate all you do to ensure parents and children have the supportive resources they need to reach stability in times of crisis and uncertainty. Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

Cc:

Secretary Cheryl Strange, Department of Social & Human Services
Assistant Secretary David Stillman, Economic Services Administration, DSHS
Jim Baumgart, Senior Policy Advisor for Human Services, Office of the Governor
Sydney Forrester, Senior Policy Advisor for Human Services, Office of the Governor
Superintendent Chris Reykdal, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Kim Justice, Executive Director, Office of Homeless Youth
Representative Tana Senn, 41st Legislative District
Senator Joe Nguyen, 34th Legislative District
Senator Jeannie Darneille, 27th Legislative District
Representative Debra Entenman, 47th Legislative District