

WOMEN'S AND FAMILY PROTECTION ACT

ABOUT NWSN:

The National Women's Shelter Network, Inc. (NWSN) is a growing nationwide network of women's and family shelters and safe haven programs promoting policies, programs, and resources that advance the safety, health and wellness of women and children experiencing or at risk of homelessness transition successfully to stable homes. NWSN currently represents **380+ women's and family shelters and safe haven programs**, partners, and allies.

BACKGROUND:

Nationwide, **over 1 million women and 2.5 million children experience homelessness every year** - and these numbers are on the rise. HUD recently recorded the largest ever year over year increase in their point in time (PIT) count of persons experiencing homelessness in 2024 at 18%. Homelessness is devastating for everyone, but for the most vulnerable it can be deadly. Women and children are at higher risk for gender-based violence such as abuse and trafficking. More than 90% women experiencing homelessness have a history of severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. An estimated 1 in 30 children will experience homelessness in their lifetime with the majority under the age of 6 in single, female headed households.

Shelters are the first responders in this nationwide epidemic of homelessness hitting women, children, and seniors the hardest. The specific needs of women and children differ from other homeless populations - and general facilities may not be equipped to address this support. Trauma-informed care, age-appropriate mental health support, and physically secure environments are just some of the factors that set NWSN's women's and family organizations apart.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL:

NWSN supports federal legislation authorizing **a set-aside within the Emergency Solutions Grants program designated for organizations who are specifically serving the needs of women and children experiencing homelessness.** The direct grants can be used to support operating costs, stabilization services, and support services designed to help the high special needs populations of women and children who are experiencing homelessness, gender-based violence, and other traumatic experiences. Funding would cap at \$505 million over 5 years inclusive of grants, technical assistance, and evaluation. **We are asking offices to serve as leads and original cosponsors for this *Women's and Family Protection Act.***

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WOMEN’S AND FAMILY PROTECTION ACT
Women, Victims of Gender-Based Violence, and Children with Special Needs
Emergency Shelter Program

Title I: AMENDMENTS TO HOMELESSNESS DEFINITIONS

Amendments to the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Home (HEARTH) Act

SEC. 101: DEFINITIONS

[Drafter’s Note: Amendments to definitions for the terms “homeless,” “homeless individual” and “homeless person” are in bold]

[42 USC 11302]. GENERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESS INDIVIDUAL.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of this Act, the term “homeless”, “homeless individual”, and “homeless person” means—

(5) an individual or family who—

(A) will imminently lose their housing, including housing they own, rent, or live in without paying rent, are sharing with others, and rooms in hotels or motels not paid for by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, as evidenced by—

(i) a court order resulting from an eviction action that notifies the individual or family that they must leave within 14 days;

(ii) the individual or family having a primary nighttime residence that is a room in a hotel or motel and where they lack the resources necessary to reside there for more than 14 days; or

(iii) credible evidence indicating that the owner or renter of the housing will not allow the individual or family to stay for more than 14 days, and any oral statement from an individual or family seeking homeless assistance that is found to be credible shall be considered credible evidence for purposes of this clause;

(B) has no subsequent residence identified; and

(C) lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing; and

(D) may reside in indigenous, rural or marginalized communities as defined by the Secretary.

(6) *Strike [“unaccompanied”]* youth and homeless families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes who—

(A) have experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing,

(B) have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period, and

(C) can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.

(D) may reside in indigenous, rural or marginalized communities as defined by the Secretary.

(b) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OTHER DANGEROUS OR LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, the Secretary shall consider to be homeless any individual or family who –

(1) is experiencing trauma or a lack of safety related to, or fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous, traumatic, or life-threatening conditions related to the violence against the individual or a family member in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized;

(2) has no other safe residence; and

(3) lacks the resources to obtain other safe permanent housing.

(4) Within the domestic violence definition, the Secretary shall specifically include women, women with children, survivors and other persons at risk of gender-based violence as a recognized term and subpopulation as that term is currently defined in applicable federal statute and regulations.

Title II: WOMEN’S AND FAMILIES’ EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

[Drafter’s Note: Additions below are intended as a set-aside within the Emergency Solutions Grants program to expand assistance to private non-profit women’s and family homeless shelters and safe haven programs.]

SEC. 201: EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANTS PROGRAM SET-ASIDE

[42 USC 11372]- GRANT ASSISTANCE

(a) GRANT ASSISTANCE. --

The Secretary shall make grants to private nonprofit organizations defined in subsection (b) for the purpose of carrying out the activities described in subsection (c).

(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES. --

The Secretary shall make direct grants to private nonprofit organizations as defined in 42 USC 11360 serving high needs populations including women and children who are homeless and pregnant, chronically homeless person, families children and youth, victims of gendered-based violence or trauma, and other special needs populations defined by the

Secretary including seniors and other homeless persons with a history of gender-based violence or trauma; in accordance with Section 101 of this Act.

(c) ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES. --

(A) IN GENERAL. – Assistance provided under subsection (a) may be used for the following activities:

- (1) Operating costs defined in 42 USC 11360.
- (2) Outpatient services, including mental health, substance use, and related services defined in 42 USC 11360.
- (3) Supportive services including childcare, employment services, case management, food, child and family therapy and trauma counseling and victim services defined in 42 USC 11360.
- (4) Housing relocation and stabilization services for homeless persons or families or individuals at risk of homelessness.
- (5) Such other services as the Secretary may designate.

(d) APPLICATION. – An eligible private nonprofit organization defined in subsection (b) above seeking a grant under subsection (a) shall submit to Secretary an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(e) EVALUATION. -- A private nonprofit organization seeking a grant under this title shall prepare and submit an evaluation of activities carried out with funds received under such grant to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may reasonably require, including a process and outcome evaluation. At a minimum, such evaluation shall include:

- (1) An unduplicated count of the number of women, children, seniors, victims of gender-based violence and other special needs populations receiving services under the grant.
- (2) An unduplicated count of the number of homeless individuals and families receiving house relocation and stabilization services.
- (3) An unduplicated count of the number of individuals placed in transitional or permanent housing.
- (4) Information on coordination between the recipients of grants under subsection (a) and state, local and tribal entities; victims of violence Continuum of Care collaborative; and solo applicants; under 42 USC Subchapter IV Part C.

(f) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

(a) IN GENERAL. – The Secretary shall make available technical assistance to private nonprofit organizations on the special needs of victims and survivors of gender-based violence including best practice trauma informed service delivery, staff training, recruitment and retention techniques and state of art coordination activities with Part B and Part C entities, and applying for and

obtaining funding for HUD, HHS, and related social services programs operated by state, county or local governments.

(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this set-aside \$500,000,000 for fiscal years 2026 through 2031 and \$5,000,000 to carry out subsection (f) for fiscal years 2026 through 2031.