

Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance
“The Future of Housing in America: Federal Housing Reforms that Create Housing Opportunity”
October 21, 2015 at 2:00 PM
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2128
Testimony submitted by Heather Bradley-Geary

I am testifying before you as a Social Worker, Supportive Housing Developer, and most importantly a Mom of two children adopted through the Missouri Foster Care system. My testimony is specific to H.R. 3700, “Housing Opportunity through Modernization Act of 2015”. H.R. 3700 makes many important changes to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s core rental assistance programs. The proposed changes increase efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of critical rental assistance programs that serve our most vulnerable citizens. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 578,424 persons are homeless on any given night in the United States, H.R. 3700 will assist us in making another step towards ending homelessness in the United States.

I would like to testify specifically, regarding the proposed legislation in H.R. 3700 regarding the Family Unification Program (FUP). The proposed legislation will allow is to make FUP a more effective housing resource available to young adults who have been involved with the foster care system. Current statute imposes limitations on the vouchers that make it very difficult for young adults to acquire affordable housing, and further, difficult for Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to administer the voucher. These limitations do not allow young adults to find adequate housing and do not allow enough time for young adults to engage in services that will ultimately assist young adults in living an independent life, away from homelessness.

According to Corporation for Supportive Housing, 23,000 young adults age of Foster Care each year. More than one in five, or 4,600, youth that age out of foster care will experience homelessness within a year of leaving care. One in four youth, or 5,750, that age out of foster care will be involved with the justice system within the first two years of leaving foster care.

On the local level in Missouri, 18,290 kids were in Department of Social Services (DSS) custody in 2014, 5,930 kids’ exited foster care in 2014 and 1,871 of youth aged out of foster care in 2014. Meaning that in Missouri, 374 young adults in Missouri will experience homelessness in 2015 and 468 young adults will be involved with the justice system in 2015 and 2016 in Missouri. We have to do better than this, we must implement policy that provides safety nets for our young adults, as they do not have the luxury of having parents as a safety net.

H.R. 3700 implements policy changes that allow us to better serve our young adults, specifically:

- Extending the age eligibility for FUP vouchers that serve young adults leaving care from 21 to 24 *States differ on the amount of time that a young adult can remain in foster care. Additionally, if young adults leave the foster care system, this policy change allows them to still be served.*
- Extending the rental assistance for youth receiving FUP vouchers from 18 to 36 months *This policy change allows young adults a longer period to find affordable housing and to be provided services.*
- Allowing FUP voucher assistance to begin 90 days prior to a young adult leaving foster care

This allows the housing search to begin, as finding affordable housing in one of the largest obstacles, and further forces HUD and HHS to work together.

- Including language requiring HUD and HHS to issue joint guidance to both PHAs and Public Child Welfare Agencies on how to improve the referral process, identify eligible recipients, and align program goals.

In order to end youth homelessness, we must have federal agencies working together and to exit their silos.

- Allowing PHA's to project-based FUP vouchers

As a developer, I support this initiative, as this allows us to develop housing at a reasonable price and provide affordable housing with services to our young adults.

- Targeting young adults under the McKinney-Vento Continuum of Care.

This allows providers to target our most vulnerable youth, who are homeless.

As a social worker, I support H.R. 3700, as it begins the conversation of providing social justice to the young adults in our country to be provided services and housing. As a Supportive Housing Developer, I support H.R. 3700, as it provides the necessary tools to develop decent, affordable housing for the young adults in our country. As a Mom of two amazing kiddos (ages 11 and 13), that were a part of the Missouri Foster Care system, I thank you for supporting H.R. 3700 that allows their foster care brothers and sisters, a place to call home, be provided a safety net, and most importantly a way out of the "system".