FamilyPromise

Family Promise's Policy Platform to Prevent and End Family Homelessness

Homelessness should be a brief and rare occurrence for children and families in our society. Yet the opposite is now true in the United States. Child and family homelessness has become all too common, with over 1.8 million children lacking a stable place to call home. 12 states and D.C. have populations smaller than our country's population of children experiencing homelessness. And there are millions more children in households who are one missed rent payment away from eviction. Over 60% of children in low-income families struggle to afford housing and are at high risk of homelessness.

The rate of child and family homelessness has increased 110% over the past 20 years. This is largely because, by some estimates, rents nationwide have increased by as much as 60% over the last 10 years, rising much faster than wages in many places. This data represents over a million individual children who are each experiencing material hardship, uncertainty, and upheaval as their family struggles to find and maintain stable housing. The anxiety and disruption associated with homelessness and housing instability are devastating to children's ability to learn, to develop strong relationships with their peers, and to focus on just being a kid.

Family Promise has been working to prevent and end homelessness for almost 40 years. We operate nearly 200 sites across the country and serve over 67,000 families annually, delivering innovative solutions to address family homelessness, including eviction prevention, shelter diversion, emergency shelter, stabilization assistance, and housing programs. Over 80% of the families that Family Promise serves secure or maintain long-term housing, because we understand that ending family homelessness requires more than simply providing a roof. It demands a holistic, service-enriched approach that addresses the root causes of housing instability.

Our work on the ground is critical to meeting the immediate needs of families in crisis, but to make significant, long-lasting progress in reducing homelessness on a large scale, we know we must also utilize our decades-long expertise to inform policy change and advance solutions that put the needs of children and families at the forefront.

We see firsthand that children and families experiencing homelessness are often less visible in their communities and are therefore overlooked in policy decisions. Children and families usually experience homelessness differently from adult individuals. Parents will do anything to keep their kids off the street, and there are not enough family shelters in most places to meet the need. Families, therefore, go wherever they can, usually in hidden situations such as staying with others temporarily, or spending their last dime paying for an overcrowded motel room. These temporary living situations allow them to fall through the gaps for federal assistance intended to help families stabilize. They don't meet the legal definition of a tenant in most places and often cannot access any available emergency rental assistance. But they also fail to meet the narrow definition of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which prioritizes the homeless population in shelters or on the street. This makes them also ineligible to receive or be assessed for help through the Homelessness Assistance Grant program.

We know the need is great — many of our sites have long waiting lists and struggle to serve all families experiencing homelessness in their communities. We also know that for families in crisis, early intervention is critical to mitigate the length and severity of homelessness and to limit the number of transitions a child experiences.

Time is of the essence. Many homeless adults first experienced homelessness as children or youth, and only if we act now will we prevent the next generation from experiencing the same fate. Our 2026 policy platform includes recommendations that would have an immediate impact if enacted into law. We know we can't do it alone, and we ask you to join us in this work. Our Action Page has tools to mobilize and build the political will necessary to advance these solutions.

Together we can ensure that no child has to experience homelessness.

Intervene Early to Help Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

Pass the bipartisan Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 6403/S. 1667)

The bipartisan Homeless Children and Youth Act has been a longtime priority of Family Promise because it would amend HUD's definition of homelessness to reduce barriers to homelessness assistance for children and families. Most children and families experiencing homelessness are initially excluded from HUD assistance and forced into desperation before they can get help. This legislation would alter HUD's definition of homelessness to align with the definitions used by other federal agencies and, therefore, more closely match the reality of how most children and families experience homelessness. Under this bill, all children and families identified as homeless by a federal service provider under one of eight specific federal programs would now be referred for assessment for HUD services. Those children and families assessed as highly vulnerable would be connected to crucial HUD resources faster. In addition, it would change incentives and requirements for federal homelessness assistance grant funding to allow service providers to tailor assistance to meet the unique needs of each homeless population in their community, including models that are most appropriate and effective for families.

Establish a flexible funding stream to divert families from shelter

The longer a child experiences homelessness, the more dangerous it is to their healthy development. It is critical to intervene early when a family becomes homeless and to limit the number of transitions children experience before their family finds stable housing. This is why, when a family experiencing homelessness comes to Family Promise, we try to do everything we can to divert them from shelter and mitigate their upheaval. A case manager works with the family to ensure the place where they are currently staying is safe and connects them with the support needed for them to obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible. This could include assistance with a security deposit, transportation to work, child care, and more. Families should not need to enter a shelter to receive help. Diverting families from shelters not only reduces trauma, but it also makes economic sense as diversion services cost much less than operating a shelter. Despite this, there is no federal pot of money available for shelter diversion services. Creating a flexible funding stream for this intervention could help many more families experiencing homelessness to avoid costly shelter stays and stabilize more quickly.

Improve the Quality and Efficiency of Homelessness Assistance

Develop quality standards for family shelter

When shelter is the only option for a family, it must be operated in a trauma-informed manner that treats families with dignity during their stay. For example, our work has shown that keeping families intact while in shelter is often critical for their mental health and well-being, and we operate shelters with non-congregate settings where possible so families can maintain privacy in their own spaces. Creating a set of quality standards for family shelters based on best practices is critical to ensuring that all shelters set families up for success. These standards should be appropriate for pregnant and parenting youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

Streamline regulations for the Continuum of Care (CoC) program and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program

The CoC and ESG programs are both administered through the Homelessness Assistance Grant program, and providers often braid funds from these programs to operate shelters, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing. Yet even when these program funds are combined for the same projects and services, the federal requirements still differ for aspects of the work, such as intake procedures, operating costs, length of stay, and more. This makes the administrative management of these projects increasingly cumbersome, especially for smaller providers. Streamlining regulations for the CoC and ESG programs will make these programs work more efficiently and effectively, and these regulations should be amended to support models that allow providers to offer both the length of assistance and the type of assistance needed for a family to achieve long-term housing stability. Any streamlining efforts must preserve existing levels of funding for homelessness assistance.

Increase Access to Affordable Housing for Children and Families

Increase funding and improve access to rental assistance for families

Young children are the individuals with the highest risk of eviction in our society, yet families with children are a declining share of recipients of rental assistance. In 2002, 52% of housing choice voucher recipients were households with children. By 2022, they made up just 30% of recipients. Even when families with children can get a voucher, they often struggle to find landlords who will accept them. A 2021 review of voucher utilization and reallocation found that voucher utilization has decreased, and some public housing authorities face challenges in using all of their allocated vouchers. We must prioritize children and families for housing assistance through legislation such as the bipartisan Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act, strengthen legal protections against source-of-income discrimination by landlords, and explore other innovative methods of rental assistance to ensure that more families can afford stable housing.

Increase the supply of manufactured housing and protect the rights of tenants

There is not nearly enough available housing in the U.S. to meet the current demand, with a shortage of nearly 5 million homes. This gap is even greater for low-income renters, for only 35 available and affordable homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households (those with incomes at or below the poverty line or at 30% of the Area Median Income). Manufactured housing, which is built off-site in a climate-controlled setting in compliance with federal standards and then transported to the home site, should play a key role in increasing the supply of affordable housing for families. These homes are less expensive and faster to build than on-site ones, while still providing safety and durability for residents. There is momentum on Capitol Hill to advance policies that support the construction of manufactured housing. We are encouraged by this momentum and support efforts such as the bipartisan Preservation and Reinvestment Initiative for Community Enhancement (PRICE) Act to preserve and increase the supply of manufactured housing, as well as efforts to reduce regulatory barriers for its development and protect the rights of tenants in manufactured and mobile homes through legislation such as the Manufactured Housing Tenant's Bill of Rights Act.

Help All Children and Families Thrive

Prevent evictions

Each year, 1.5 million children experience an eviction, and another 3 million children are threatened with one. Families who experience an eviction are at significant risk of experiencing homelessness, and mothers who experience an eviction are more likely to report depression and poor health outcomes. Having an eviction on a family's record makes it very difficult for them to find new housing or qualify for loans, creating a spiral of material hardship. Increasing renters' access to affordable legal representation in housing disputes, such as through civil legal aid, is one crucial way to prevent more evictions. Families facing eviction also need access to emergency rental assistance — for many renters, a small amount of help is enough to prevent an eviction. The bipartisan Eviction Crisis Act provides a good first step by establishing a permanent emergency rental assistance program, supporting landlord-tenant community courts, and improving tenant screening reports.

Support economic mobility

Preventing families from experiencing homelessness is not enough. Children and their families deserve to thrive rather than just survive, and this means investments and policies that support their upward economic mobility. Parents often have the fewest resources when their children are young, as their earning potential is low while they are also grappling with the high costs of child care, diapers, medical expenses, and more. Investments such as increasing the supply of affordable child care, improving the Child Tax Credit to reach families with the greatest need, improving access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave, addressing benefits cliffs in programs, and more are necessary to not only help families weather times of financial instability but also give parents the support they need to pursue higher education, job training, and ultimately earn more. Research shows that investing in families has a multi-generational impact, supporting the healthy development of children in the household and contributing to their future success.

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