



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

**Opening Statement of Chairman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (CNMI)**

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing

*Picking up the Pieces: Strengthening Connections with Students Experiencing Homelessness and Children in Foster Care*

Wednesday, May 19, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

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Today's hearing is focused on our responsibility to support the education of children who are homeless or in foster care.

Children without stable homes start at a disadvantage that can follow them for the rest of their lives, denying them the opportunity to achieve their full potential as human beings and members of society.

That is a tragedy for them and a loss for us all.

This is not an insignificant problem.

More than 1.3 million school-aged children lacked a stable and adequate place to sleep during the 2018-2019 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

More than 1.4 million children under the age of six experience homelessness.

Recent research in Michigan suggests almost one in ten public school students will be homeless at some point before graduation from high school. One in ten.

Prior to the pandemic, the Department of Health and Human Services estimated that 430,000 children were in foster care.

And, of course, youth homelessness reflects other persistent inequities in education and across our society.

Black children, Native American children, students with disabilities, English language learners, and L-G-B-T-Q children are all more likely to experience homelessness and foster care than their peers.

The outcomes are clear: In 2018, the graduation rate for homeless students was 68 percent nationwide and 86 percent for those with stable homes.

And the pandemic has only made the problem worse.

We all know how hard it has been for our constituents to keep their children on track with their education during the pandemic. Even children with stable homes have faced difficulty.

For children who are homeless or in foster care, moving from place to place, those difficulties have been even more severe. Research indicates from 1 to 3 million children have not attended school, since the pandemic began, and principal among them are students experiencing homelessness or in foster care.

This does not simply mean lost classroom time. The pandemic has jeopardized access to clothing; to adequate, nutritious food; to health care and other critical aid schools provide.

The consequences of this gap in the services that homeless children have been able to access will be felt by all of us long after the pandemic is behind us.

This is not to say Congress has been idle.

The American Rescue Plan, which we passed in March, provides \$1 billion to strengthen Head Start programs, which holistically help young children deal with the many challenges of experiencing homelessness and foster care.

This funding is designed not only to cover the increased costs of providing education during the pandemic, but also, where possible, to help children catch up on lost instruction time.

Our American Rescue Plan includes \$39 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which provides flexibilities so families experiencing homelessness can access childcare.

The American Rescue Plan brought \$130 billion to communities nationwide for K-12 education and includes \$800 million, specifically, to help homeless children and secure the staff and resources homeless students need to remain connected to school.

What challenges are school districts facing in identifying and serving students experiencing homelessness and children in foster care? How are school districts using COVID relief funds to ensure these unique populations of students are connected with the services they need to be successful?

Our witnesses today will help answer those questions and provide feedback on how the investments we made in the American Rescue Plan and other relief legislation are helping vulnerable students make it through the COVID-19 pandemic and how those investments will help protect these children in the future from the trauma of experiencing homelessness and in the foster care system.

I now turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. Owens, for the purpose of making an opening statement.