

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports that there are more than 111,000 homeless children and youth in the 1,031 school districts across the state. Approximately 15% of this population experience homelessness without a parent or guardian.¹ Despite the large number of young Texans who experience homelessness and its risk factors, there is no single state agency responsible for strategically addressing youth homelessness.

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) is the lead agency responsible for awarding and coordinating programs and funding that increase the capacity of affordable housing. Currently in the Texas Government Code, there is a list of “special needs” populations that must fall under the charge of the department. This list includes, but is not limited to, individuals with substance use disorders, elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Youth and young adults experiencing homelessness are unfortunately left off the list. This hinders collaborative work across the state and deprives policymakers and other interested stakeholders of critical guidance they could use to prevent vulnerable young people from growing into chronically homeless adults.²

Of course, youth homelessness is a social issue that challenges many state agencies, including TEA, TDHCA, the Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department and the Health and Human Services Commission. For this reason, it is also important to strengthen the work of the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless, a cross-systems advisory body for TDHCA, in the area of youth homelessness. Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) and other experts are available to provide critical guidance and support, at no cost to the state, to tackle the challenge of supporting Texas’ most vulnerable but resilient young people.

Recommendations:

Amend:

- Texas Government Code 2306.0721 to include homeless youth³ in the list of populations for which TDHCA must evaluate housing needs and determine population size.
- Texas Government Code 2306.905 to allow the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless and each of its represented agencies to seek program or policy assistance from an organization that has a network of providers with expertise in youth homelessness.

¹ Texas Appleseed and Texas Network of Youth Services. February 2017. *Young and Homeless in Texas*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2EHvz1>; Texas Appleseed and Texas Network of Youth Services. November, 2017. *Young Alone and Homeless in the Lone Star State. Policy Solutions to End Youth Homelessness in Texas*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2RiNZbT>.

² Lee, B., Tyler, K. and Wright, J. March 2010. The New Homelessness Revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26: 501-521; Koegel, P., Melamid, E., Burnam, 1995. M. Childhood Risk Factors for Homelessness among Homeless Adults. *American Journal of Public Health*. 85(12): 1642-1649.

³ Homeless youth consists of two populations: minors who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and those ages 18-25 experiencing homelessness.

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