

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 214

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Hearing Date: April 29, 2021 8:00 AM

Gabriella McDonald

Texas Appleseed

Austin, TX

Texas Appleseed supports HB 214. We became interested in systemic problems that fuel youth homelessness as a result of our work on other child- and youth-focused projects. We frequently saw children and young people whose juvenile justice involvement or problems at school were the result of homelessness or housing instability. We met former foster youth who reported that they were inadequately prepared for adulthood when they aged out and, consequently, ended up on the streets for some period of time. And our fair housing work revealed to us the difficulties that communities and families across the state struggle with caused by the lack of affordable and safe housing.

What resulted in November 2017, was a report produced in partnership with TNOYS that explored (1) what it was like to be young and homeless in the State of Texas and (2) policy recommendations and solutions that addressed the systemic issues that homeless youth face in their everyday lives. This report is available at https://www.texasappleseed.org/sites/default/files/YoungAloneHomeless_FullReport_fin.pdf.

One important policy solution was that “Texas should create incentives for youth to stay in school and work toward higher education goals, and find ways to eliminate barriers to higher education for youth experiencing homelessness.” Specifically, “Texas should designate homeless liaisons at all public colleges and universities. The needs of youth experiencing homelessness evolve as they enter higher education. A college homeless liaison would create a much-needed support system for these high-risk students.”

Currently, under the McKinney-Vento Act, every school district in the country is required to have a homeless liaison. Under Texas law, foster care liaisons are also required K-12 & in college. These liaisons are a necessity because these students have special needs to ensure their success. These liaisons ensure, among other things, that these students are properly enrolled, have access to food, shelter, and health care, and are generally provided the resources they need to graduate. HB 214 logically extends those benefits to homeless college students.

One other problem that our research revealed was that a “[l]ack of year-round housing near a college campus is a major barrier for youth who wish to pursue higher education” and local universities should be educated “about students experiencing homelessness or exiting foster care and work with them to implement year-round dorm programs.” HB 214 also addresses this issue by ensuring that students experiencing homelessness are guaranteed priority access to on-campus housing, when available. It further ensures housing is provided in-between terms.

State legislatures across the country have been supporting homeless college students over the past few years by homeless liaisons on campuses, housing support programs, tuition and/or fee waivers, etc. Texas should help lead the way by passing HB 214.

Amanda List

Texas Appleseed

Austin, TX

Texas Appleseed supports this bill. We appreciate Representative Thierry for filing this legislation.

Maddie Kennedy

Thrive Youth Center

San Antonio, TX

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Please support HB 214, and young Texans in need. We know that homeless youth need and deserve extra supports, particularly in a university setting. Support this higher-risk population in an effort that can allow them to gain financial independence, access to good jobs, and a degree- with supports that acknowledge their specific needs.