This report highlights key findings from the 'Roundtable Discussion' hosted by Congressperson Dwight Evans and People’s Emergency Center (PEC) on September 18, 2020. We teamed up to answer the question: Are young children who experience homelessness accessing high quality early learning programs, i.e., Head Start, high quality childcare, and home visiting, in spite of COVID 19? What steps can we take to align community-wide systems to coordinate crisis services for homeless children?
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. Congressperson Dwight Evans and People's Emergency Center (PEC) convened a panel of 16 experts to offer commentary and recommendations to address these issues. The purpose was to influence the narrative of young children experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia by identifying policies that need to be addressed and brought to the attention of stakeholders and policy makers. More than 435 people reviewed the live meeting, and the video offered later was viewed more than 1,300 times.

Through our work with children experiencing homelessness, we frequently see how traumatic experiences related to homelessness affect children. Researchers from across the country, like those associated with the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, are finding data to support those observations. One way to mitigate these factors for these children is enrollment in high quality early childhood education, which offers the support of caring adults, early intervention strategies, and curriculum that balance cognitive, language, social, and emotional development in young children.

In 2020, COVID-19 caused the early learning community to shut down, and threatened funding of childcare, Head Start, home visiting programs and more. For the thousands of families experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia, the pressure to find a home, educate their child, and access childcare and other community resources is overwhelming.

The panel offered more than 50 recommendations summarized below:

- **Improvements in coordination through partnerships.**
  Continue and expand partnerships with stakeholders like parents, early childhood education centers, and housing providers.

- **Data**
  Develop a more effective data system so that we can target specific support to each of the 2,500 children who participate in shelter per year.

- **Increase and maintain enrollments**
  There is a need to locate and enroll more children experiencing homelessness and to maintain these enrollments as families' circumstances change.

- **Strengthen Safety Net**
  Advocate that HUD expand its definition/criteria for funding to include early childhood supports, thus marshalling existing and new resources to ensure that the needed programs and people are available.

**Next steps** include:

- Pass the Emergency Family Stabilization Act (EFSA), H.R. 7950, a bipartisan, bicameral legislation written to create a new emergency funding stream through the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) providing flexible funds that could be used for a wide variety of housing, health, education, and safety-related needs. Learn more at [https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/efsa-introduced/](https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/efsa-introduced/)

- **Increase and monitor enrollments.** The Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) and the childcare, Head Start, and home visiting systems will continue to work to increase and maintain enrollment of children experiencing homelessness.

- **Continue the virtual transition to learning while homeless**, i.e., expand distribution of Chromebooks, increase internet connectivity, and more.
KATHY DESMOND: Children are not at the center of discussions on homelessness, and we need to change that. We are working with Congressperson Dwight Evans because of his keen interest in children. His district includes most of the family shelters in Philadelphia, and many schools with the largest number of children experiencing homelessness. Working together with our colleagues in the homeless housing system we can help children overcome the challenges to their development caused by homelessness. We are grateful for Mr. Evans’ partnership and leadership.

DWIGHT EVANS: As a member of the Ways and Means Committee, with jurisdiction over child care and home visiting, I recognize the value of early education in improving outcomes for low-income families. This really matters in my congressional district, where the child poverty rate was nearly 30% in 2019.

BERNADINE HAWES: The PEC Policy Advisory Council deliberated on the more than 50 recommendations offered by the panelists. The Council believes the recommendations we are sharing are critical to helping create resilient communities for our children.

People’s Emergency Center Policy Advisory Council

- **Bernadine Hawes**, Chair, PEC Advisory Council; PEC Board Member
- **Amanda Atkinson**, Senior Director, Early Childhood Initiatives, Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC)
- **Dr. JJ Cutuli**, Research Scientist, Nemours Children's Health System and BELL Data Consultant
- **Tara Dechert**, Project Director, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Policy Lab
- **Kathy Desmond**, President, PEC
- **Tracy Duarte**, Director, PA Head Start Collaboration
- **Roslyn Edwards**, Director, Building Early Links for Learning (BELL), PEC
- **Michael Verrill**, VP Strategic Development at The Sharp Financial Group, Board Member of PEC
- **Brandon Weber**, VP, Wells Fargo and PEC Board member
- **Dr. Grace Whitney**, Former Early Learning Director, SchoolHouse Connection
- **Joe Willard**, VP for Policy, PEC
Overview of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Philadelphia

- For Philadelphia's families experiencing homelessness, the pressure to find a home, educate one's child, and access childcare and other community resources is overwhelming. Homelessness and the negative experiences that tend to go along with it all threaten healthy development. COVID-19 shut down much of the early learning community and threatens funding of childcare, Head Start, home visiting programs and more. These experiences increase lifelong risk for poor physical and emotional health, educational achievement, and relationship struggles.

- More than 1,700 young children stay in Philadelphia family homeless shelters each year. Many of these families are fleeing domestic violence, neighborhood violence, substandard housing, disaster or eviction. Some are coming from a stable context and are experiencing instability for the first time. For many others, the move to shelter is just the latest stop in a long series of unstable living situations. Still others have experienced housing instability their entire, young lives and do not know anything else.

- In 2007, the Congressional reauthorization of Head Start required the adoption of the expanded version of the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and the prioritization of children experiencing homelessness. In 2015, the United States Administration for Children and Families issued guidelines to its programs that intended to increase access for homeless children into its programs.

- People's Emergency Center (PEC) created the Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) project in 2016, with the goal of creating linkages between the homeless housing and early learning communities that would lead to increasing access. In September 2019, BELL raised awareness by organizing a summit attended by 300 leaders and featuring the national Head Start Director, Dr. Deborah Bergeron, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director, Mr. Matthew Doherty, plus leaders from the tri-state region to discuss all efforts to increase access.

This year, BELL staff decided to raise awareness of issues these families face due to COVID-19 and the decline in government support for early learning and homelessness. What are the outcomes of those policy changes, particularly now that COVID-19 is decimating the systems? How are systems adapting?
OBSERVATIONS

We asked 16 experts to offer their observations and recommendations. Here are just some excerpts from their contribution (listed in alphabetical order).

Amanda Atkinson, Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC)

- Our national landscape analysis of strategies to increase utilization of early learning programming by children experiencing homelessness identified that consistent themes in the approaches that were most effective in recruiting and retaining participation of families experiencing homelessness were that the service model included a family-informed definition of quality, that children were identified as clients as well as their parents, and that program models were designed to accommodate family instability to achieve sustained participation.

- Children whose housing status meets the definition of homelessness are not exclusively serviced by Head Start and Early Head Start. Early learning providers across the publicly and privately funded systems are knowingly and unknowingly delivering services to this population. In addition, children move between funding sources as their locations and eligibility criteria change. To create a more complete data set of the services we are delivering, we need to establish a sector wide data strategy. This will require coordination across early learning funders. This comprehensive data set is essential to measure progress toward our goals.

- Early education and housing providers in Philadelphia have actively partnered to improve services to children experiencing homelessness. Yet, too few young children who experience homelessness in Philadelphia benefit from the available early learning interventions.

Omari Baye, Executive Director - ACTS of the Apostle Emergency Housing Program

- It’s important when considering the factors surrounding the utilization of resources provided in shelter, that we are aware of personal bias, and acknowledge that homeless families are not a monolithic group. Instead,
homeless families are better viewed with respect to their individual circumstances, beliefs, and customs.

- As it pertains to the provision of (ECE) services, there are a number of legitimate reasons participants may underutilize or “not take advantage of” supports/services presented to them in shelter.

- Homeless families are often unaware of the duration of their shelter stay, so in an attempt to maintain stability in the lives of their children, as it pertains to making abrupt changes to their social/academic environments, a parent may elect to continue traveling upwards of two miles from the shelter placement to maintain the child’s enrollment in a respective daycare/school.

- It is customary for elderly and extended family members to provide childcare for some families, so to maintain the connection and support, parents may elect not to disrupt the arrangements.

- Resources received through PEC, BELL, and a recent PA Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) mini grant have allowed ACTS, to strengthen wireless capability throughout our family site, create a print lab, and provide new nine computers for children who either weren’t provided one or received defective equipment. As a result of the funding and support received, children and families at ACTS with the assistance of our team, were able to expedite the registration for school, experience few signal lapses when logging on for class, engage in homework clubs, and receive technical support from our participant liaisons.

- Providing persons entering shelter immediate access to funding for high quality child care placement may reduce the amount of time spent in shelter.

**Tracey Campanini, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning**, presented an overview of early childhood programs that support families experiencing homelessness. These included:

- **Child Care Works (CCW)-** Pennsylvania’s subsidized childcare program supported by Child Care Development Funds (CCDF), Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) funding. Families experiencing homelessness are eligible for presumptive eligibility at application
and redetermination. This means a parent/caretaker does not have to be meeting the work requirements (working at least 20 hours a week or working at least 10 hours and attending training 10 hours a week) in order to be eligible for CCW. Presumptive eligibility allows the parent/caretaker 92 days to complete a job search. If the parent/caretaker is meeting the work requirements at the end of the 92 days, eligibility will continue for 12 months. Children experiencing homelessness who are determined eligible for CCW are prioritized for funding.

- State-funded Head Start – funding to expand the number of slots funded by the Administration for Children and Families through the federal Head Start Program. Families identified as homeless under McKinney-Vento are prioritized by local grantees for enrollment.

- State-funded preschool - Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC). Funding supports families up to 300 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Local grant recipients develop priorities for enrollment, of which OCDEL encourages homelessness to be a priority for enrollment.

- Early Intervention Birth to Three and Preschool Early Intervention - Young children experiencing homelessness are at increased risk for delays in development. Infant and toddler Early Intervention (EI) provides developmental screening and at-risk tracking supports for children under the age of three experiencing homelessness. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is the developmental screening tool used by EI programs.

- Evidence-Based Home Visiting and Family Supports. Families experiencing homelessness are high priority in many programs.

JJ Cutuli, Senior Research Scientist with Nemours Children’s Health System

- Quality early childhood programs are among the most powerful contexts to support young children and their families. Participating in these programs predicts good outcomes for children, promoting resilience with effects that sometimes extend across decades.
• If we want more resilience, then policy and practice decisionmakers must ensure that responsive contexts like early childhood programs are available to children who experience homelessness and other adversities.

• Decisionmakers need information about how often children in shelter participate in high quality early childhood programs and then remove barriers where they appear.

• Right now, there is no comprehensive data system for early childhood programs in Pennsylvania or in Philadelphia to inform who is enrolled in a quality program. There is no single requirement for all high-quality programs to contribute individual enrollment data to such a system, partly because there is no common mandate that spans federal, state, and local funding mechanisms.

• Decisionmakers are unable to tell who gets into these programs, who stays in, who benefits, and who is left behind. Only an estimated 27% of young children in shelter attend a high-quality program.

• The capacity to have such a data system exists at the state level. However, there is no single requirement for all high-quality programs to contribute individual enrollment data, partly because there is no common mandate that spans federal, state, and local funding programs.

**Tracy Duarte, Director, PA Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO)**

• Data – prior to the pandemic, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) reported 24,300 or one out of 35 children under six to be experiencing homelessness. Of those, only 32% were served by federally funded Head Start/Early Head Start or McKinney Vento programs.

• What is working? The Office of Head Start, under the leadership of Dr. Deborah Bergeron began the "Home At Head Start" Campaign in 2019 to encourage all Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to increase the number of children experiencing homelessness that they are recruiting and enrolling into their programs.

• The PA HSSCO was able to leverage more than $420,000 in federal Pre-School Development Grant (PDG)-Birth-5 funding from the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning in the spring of 2020 to provide 59 mini-grants of up to $10,000 each to family homeless shelters across PA.
The PA HSSCO regularly partners with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program (ECYEH). These two entities partnered to hold eight regional meetings in 2018 and 2019 in order to bring together Head Start staff, McKinney-Vento Liaisons, Regional Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) staff and local homeless providers to provide supports, resources and educational materials. This collaboration continues to grow virtually.

PA has an Early Childhood Homelessness Stakeholder group at the State level that meets 6 times per year and develops strategies to improve services to young children and families experiencing homelessness.

Tara Dechert, Project Director at PolicyLab, a research center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

For nearly a decade, we have partnered with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to evaluate federally funded home visiting programs across the state.

Prior to my position at PolicyLab, I worked for an evidence-based home visiting model - the Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office, supporting a range of evidence-based home visiting services.

This combined, first-hand experience showed me the tremendous value home visiting services can have on families, particularly in the health and development of children. For example, families receiving home visiting services have a greater adherence to the well-child visit schedule, as well as immunization compliance.

It is for this reason, as well as the many other health benefits of home visiting, that PolicyLab launched the Community Clinical Services Integration initiative. The goal of the Community Clinical Services Integration initiative is to develop processes that integrate services between home visiting and pediatric primary care. By identifying and promoting unified integration processes, our hope is to improve patient care by creating consistent communication between the home visitor, the family, and the pediatric provider.

As an evidence-based intervention skilled in family-focused education, goal setting, and connectivity to other services, as well as their long-term relationship with families, home visiting is in a unique position to improve the health, social,
and economic well-being of families. This is especially true for those living with homelessness.

- By offering the stability of a home visitor and connecting that back to the health system, we hope families will experience enhanced support and care coordination that will positively impact their overall health and well-being.

**Ineeze Gainey, Owner/Director of Children’s Playhouse Childcare Center**

- I was a homeless child living at PEC. As an adult, PEC helped me get my first home, which is where I started my child care center business in the same neighborhood that I grew up in. One of the reasons I wanted to purchase a home in my community was that I wanted to offer high quality care to the children. They should be given the opportunity of high quality care no matter what neighborhood they live in. COVID has been very challenging deciding whether or not to close. I did close at one point to be cautious. I opened in July, things are slow, but coming along. I am very grateful for the state for supporting us and keeping our facility open. I hope they continue the support that they have given us and to continue the safety features that we now have. I just want to say ‘thank you.’

**Beth Gonzales, Deputy Director, Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services**

- Research has shown that homeless households throughout the Commonwealth, and in Philadelphia, consistently identify finding childcare, that is both high-quality and affordable, a barrier to sustaining consistent employment. Moreover, barriers make it difficult to access early learning programs. The staff of the BELL project help families not only access and enroll in these programs, they help families stabilize and thrive. Not just in shelter, but also when they also move into permanent housing.

- We are planning for a housing surge to help move households into permanent housing to keep them safe now, and into the future with Emergency Solutions Grant funding (ESG-CV) through the Commonwealth and the CARES Act. With a portion of this funding, we also plan to help participants move out of the shelter system and into housing and lowering barriers to pursuing employment and education by offering additional supports as part of their move on strategy, specifically childcare supports. For this initiative, we have identified participants who could potentially benefit most from this support, as well as Rapid Rehousing funded by ESG-CV, which is potentially over 960 children and their parents.

- As part of our work, we have partnered with family providers to ensure families in the homeless system get access to high quality early learning centers. This project has positively impacted the lives of many homeless children and families.
• BELL not only ensures the development of children, it also helps stabilize parents/families as they seek housing, employment, and education.

• Our commitment to addressing the needs of Philadelphia’s homeless families, specifically those in need of high quality care has been prioritized in our strategic plan, Roadmap to Homes, which we released in 2018 after the need and gap for developmentally appropriate care for homeless children was identified during our planning process.

Deborah Hartranft, Program Manager, Intake PreK, School District of Philadelphia Early Childhood Department

• PreK enrollment: Children experiencing homelessness are deemed automatically eligible for PreK grant funded programs, required documentation waived and/or delayed, placement priority throughout the year.

• We are continually using the Self-assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs to assess and reassess our policies and procedures to ensure that we are adequately and equitably reaching and servicing our McKinney-Vento families.

• What we've learned, what works, what doesn't: Having different definitions of homelessness is problematic. PreK uses McKinney-Vento definition to define who is experiencing homelessness.

• Important to use the words the family uses to describe themselves. Families don’t often define themselves as that for a variety of reasons.

Charlene Heeney, Community Involvement Specialist at the Health Federation of Philadelphia-Early Head Start Program (HPS-EHS)

• HFP-EHS is a federally funded, nonprofit home-based educational program that provides home based educational services to expecting families and/or families parenting children from ages zero to three.

• HFP-EHS is present in shelters within our servicing zip codes (North Philly). We have developed partnerships with the shelters that allow us to come in person and present to/ recruit new families that meet our enrollment criteria and receive referrals from the shelters.

• Our relationship with the BELL project has allowed us to interact with and enroll even more families that are experiencing homelessness and provide them with our comprehensive services through referrals and events.
• Families experiencing homelessness automatically meet our enrollment requirements and are prioritized during the referral process.

• During this pandemic, EHS is primarily utilizing our partnerships with different organizations throughout Philadelphia, including the shelters and BELL project, to obtain referrals. We are also utilizing social media and circulating our flyers and event information to recruit families that meet our enrollment criteria. Informing families experiencing homelessness that EHS is still enrolling and providing services during this pandemic is crucial to helping them access our services!

Patricia Julianelle, Senior Strategist for Program Advancement and Legal Affairs/SchoolHouse Connection

• Before the pandemic, the United States Department of Education estimated that 1.4 million children under the age of six – infants, toddlers, and preschoolers – were experiencing homelessness. That is one in every 16 young children. As disturbing as these numbers are, we know that they significantly underestimate the actual number of young children experiencing homelessness, and that the pandemic has made things worse.

• Nationally and in Pennsylvania, more than 70% of children identified as homeless are staying with other people temporarily in situations that are unstable and that jeopardize child development. Not only do communities lack adequate shelter for families, but many families fear shelter – this is especially true during the pandemic. In the age of COVID-19, temporarily staying with other people means that families cannot social distance or self-quarantine; they are at the mercy of others in arrangements that are precarious, volatile, and lead to frequent moves. They are less visible, not less vulnerable.

• For our part, we’ve recently launched a national public awareness campaign, enlisting help from Elmo, to help reach families who may be particularly isolated and disconnected from school and early supports at this time. We’ve highlighted innovation and promising models, including the trailblazing work of People’s Emergency Center and the BELL Project. We recently kicked off a 15-state community of practice through our Education Leads Home campaign to identify and replicate best practices.
Sean Perkins, City of Philadelphia’s Chief of Early Childhood Education

- What we know is that too many families endure significant access barriers, and they disproportionately affect those with historical and cultural disadvantages.

- Our commitments are to provide resources that are beneficial to children, families, providers and staff by:
  - Offering health resources and conducting developmental screenings
  - Supporting staff growth and development
  - Increasing center quality and providing instructional resources
  - Promoting Kindergarten registration and transition activities

- The PHLpreK program currently has 3,300 seats at over 130 sites across the city. It has grown by 65% over the last three years, and we continue to focus on breaking barriers to access food, transportation, housing, healthcare, employment, and, in my office, education.

- How do we do this? By leading, supporting, partnering, and learning
  - Lead on PHLprek Program by funding seats using an equity-based data driven approach. We also created 77 Access Centers across the city where registered students can participate in virtual learning.
  - The Access Centers can serve over 2,100 of Philadelphia’s most vulnerable children in grades K through six, providing a safe, supervised, and connected environment. For families to be eligible, caregivers must work outside of the home and not have access to other childcare options.
  - The Access Centers are hosted at select Parks & Rec locations, Free Library branches, Philadelphia Housing Authority sites, and Out-of-School Time programs funded by the Office of Children and Families.
  - Seats are still available and families can start the registration process by visiting https://www.phila.gov/access-center-finder/ or calling (215) 709-5366.

Rashanda Perryman, Program Officer, Community Stewardship, Vanguard Strong Start for Kids™
• This issue directly aligns with the cornerstone of our investment philosophy that early childhood education investment pays off later.

• When we sought to understand the benefits of early childhood learning, not only did we trust the researchers and many experts ... but our own internal economists working in our investment group who work with clients to make good decisions, they reviewed the research studies on early childhood and confirmed that expanding access to early childhood education through good national and local policies and resources would have broad economic benefits later on.

Roslyn Robinson, Children’s Education Coordinator, Woodstock Family Center

• I am on the front line in the shelter; it is the BELL project that enables our families to get a fair start. We have 64 families and 135 children. We have children coming in with Chromebooks but cannot get the Wifi working. We have parents come to the door and they are struggling with the school information. They cannot get connected.

• Without organizations coming into our shelter and offering services, screenings, trainings, taking our hand and helping us, we make a phone call and you give me the resources to support the families. I get packages, information to support the families, but families still hit the wall. We don’t have the resources. We're in the trenches, we are the real deal, I am asking for every parent in every shelter, without your support we are in trouble. We can make a difference here in the trenches.

Elliot Weinbaum, Program Manager, Great Learning, The William Penn Foundation

• Over the past four years, the William Penn Foundation has invested more than $2.3 million to increase supports for families, programs, and communities and increase the likelihood that children experiencing homelessness have the early learning opportunities that they need and deserve.

• I want to be clear that all of this will be easier, cheaper, more effective, and more efficient if we end homelessness in our city. We can talk about the unique strategies to meet the needs of families who are homeless, and we must pursue those immediately, but we should not lose sight of the fact that we should not need these strategies at all and we must continue to work on the overall strategy to end homelessness.

• As so many corporate, political, non-profit, and other leaders recently talk about a commitment to making investments with attention toward equity, it is important to note that about 90% of those entering kindergarteners who are experiencing homelessness are Black and Latino. So this is an economic issue,
because we know that students who aren’t well prepared for Kindergarten suffer later in schooling. It’s an equity issue because Black and Latino children are disproportionately represented among this population. Collectively, we need to commit to wrapping our minds, hearts, arms, and resources around the 2,500 kids who experience homelessness each year and make sure that each one of them have adults at home prepared to support early learning, a high quality program to attend, and a community that has programs and places to support early learning when the children are not with family and not in a program.
The panelists offered more than 50 recommendations. After a review, the PEC Policy Advisory Council identified four main themes:

- **Improvements in coordination through partnerships**: Panelists identified at least 13 specific ways to increase partnership between shelter providers and early education providers. Intentional efforts that facilitate and promote ongoing communication among a wide variety of service providers would create additional opportunities for connecting families with resources in communities.

- **Data**: Develop a more effective data system so that we can target specific support to each of the 2,500 children experiencing homelessness each year. This could include capturing enrollment data from programs for children from birth until kindergarten-eligibility to contribute into a regional system. This could also include data from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) so that children not captured because they are rerouted out of the housing system are still identified for supports to ensure quality and stability. This would empower policy and practice decisionmakers with important information about access to these programs that support early development and promote resilience for children who experience homelessness.

- **Increase and maintain enrollments**: There is a need to locate and enroll more children experiencing homelessness and a need to maintain these enrollments. The continuity provided by consistent early learning program participation can be an important source of stability for children and families. Asset-oriented approaches to identification and recruitment of families should include the provision of choices in available early learning opportunities including licensed family childcare, center-based childcare, home-visiting, or some combination of these options and supports identified to ensure ongoing participation.

- **Advocate** that HUD expand its definition/criteria for funding to include early childhood supports, marshalling existing and new resources to ensure that the needed programs and people are available. Additionally, the targeting of a portion of early childhood capacity or designation of new resources to this population would further expand supports to families.

Here are most of the recommendations grouped into the major themes. Some recommendations appear once as several panelists offered an identical recommendation. Some of the recommendations might seem slightly repetitive, but we included them as they have variations and nuances specific to the panelist.
Improvements in coordination through partnerships

- Shelter and early childhood systems need to increase focus on opportunities for younger children as they are less likely to participate in high-quality early childhood programs.

- Parents and agency staff can influence policy by seeking participation in the Early Learning Resource Center’s Regional Leadership Council, the Local Interagency Coordinating Council, and the state councils of the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) and Early Learning Council.

- The three primary early childhood education funding streams could designate a contact in each community and at the state level to facilitate collaboration among parents, agencies, and centers. This would mean singling out the Head Start Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) person, someone from Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and the McKinney-Vento liaison in the Education departments.

- We will need to more consistently embed intentional consideration and inclusion of children experiencing homelessness throughout the early learning policy framework.

- Continue the ongoing work of the collaboration that has gotten so much of the work here underway, including representatives from social services, government, health, and education to think creatively and systematically about serving those children.

- Holding federal and state agencies accountable for providing oversight and robust implementation of existing federal law, e.g., Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act requires HUD homeless programs to designate staff to ensure homeless children are enrolled in school and early childhood programs, but this provision has been all but ignored by the agency, and Administration of Children and Families (ACF) could do more to ensure that state CCDF provisions on homelessness are in place, and robustly implemented.

- Head Start and other quality early childhood programs could designate a point of contact for children experiencing homelessness and other mobile, vulnerable children.

- Hard work requires our continued partnerships and more direct links to those facing homelessness, including what we know allows generational
improvements: high quality early childhood education.

- More opportunities to continue collaboration between shelter providers and education providers. Continued connection of these services is imperative. Staff of both systems and needs of the community are always in flux.

- There is a need for a centralized way to share resources, data, etc. across both housing and early childhood education systems.

- We believe that community partners and health care must work together to prevent and end homelessness and improve the overall health and well-being of families, and home visiting can play an important role in this regard.

- Communication is needed between policymakers and childcare centers.

- Encourage state and local governments to collaborate more closely to help overcome barriers and increase participation in quality early childcare and education programs. Similarly, there must be deeper collaboration between schools, service provider agencies, and early childhood programs to increase enrollment.

- Increase system integration of the homeless system and early learning system to ensure we meet the needs of homeless families and they get the support that is needed to service homeless families and those at risk of homelessness to address the developmental needs of children.

- Shelter and early childhood systems need to increase focus on opportunities for younger children as they are less likely to participate in high-quality early childhood programs. There is not enough high-quality infant and toddler care available to meet the need.

- Increase coordination between shelters and programs to streamline referrals and enrollments, while also allowing the sharing of data and paperwork across these systems so clients have an easier time accessing services.

- Most family shelters need support to serve young children experiencing homelessness as many are not staffed adequately enough, and their buildings need improvements.

- Policy decision makers need to encourage more high-quality early childhood programs to create pathways for families in shelter to participate. Before COVID, early childhood centers needed the funding to improve and to keep their heads above water. During and after this pandemic, they need funding to survive.
Data

- A more effective data system is needed so that we can target specific support to each of the 2,500 children younger than age five experiencing homelessness. This could include capturing **data** from programs for children from birth until kindergarten-eligibility to contribute individual enrollment data into a regional system. This would let us know about access and application status, who is served, and who is not, in order to truly capture the need, as well as identify the barriers and how we can work together. This will empower policy and practice decisionmakers with important information about access to these programs that support early development and promote resilience for children who experience homelessness.

- A memorandum of understanding template for state and county officials and providers might articulate a goal to work toward and specify what is available and what is still needed.

- We must ensure that our centralized data and enrollment systems reinforce the development of trusting relationships between providers and families and eliminate penalties for providers that are acting to meet the needs of families in crisis.

Increase and maintain enrollments

- We need to locate and enroll more children experiencing homelessness but we must do more to maintain these enrollments. Asset-oriented approaches to identification and recruitment of families should include the provision of choices in early learning opportunities, including licensed family childcare, center-based childcare, home-visiting, or some combination of these options. We must develop opportunities to involve families in the design of early learning services when they are not in acute crisis.

- To reach more children, one strategy that we can expand locally is to include promotion of early learning opportunities to families that have indicators of housing instability including a history of evictions or a current risk of eviction. Intentional coordination between city agencies could support this effort. Establishing prioritized enrollment of this population could achieve broader impacts.

- It may be beneficial to make changes to policies surrounding the access to CCR&R funding for early childhood education services. With the average emergency housing stay prior to the introduction of Rapid Rehousing programming being eight to 15 months, allowing persons entering shelter...
immediate access to funding for high quality childcare placement may reduce the amount of time spent in shelter. This aid may also significantly increase sheltered youths' access to high quality childcare and socio-emotional advancement/development prior to entering kindergarten.

- We need to be more connected to those we serve to reach more individuals.

More resources

- Recommend HUD expand its definition/criteria for funding to include early childhood supports – more flexible funding is needed to serve homeless children, youth and families.

- Marshalling of existing and new resources to ensure that the needed programs and people are available.

- Housing programs need support to have child-focused space, materials, resources, staffing, etc.

- Increase funding so that individuals can continue to receive Head Start and Early Head Start services.

- Provide trauma informed services.

- Health care services are more effective when a patient is stably housed, and in turn, maintaining housing is more likely if proper health care services are delivered.

- Policy decision makers need to encourage more high-quality early childhood programs to create pathways for families in shelter to participate.


- Supporting childcare centers with virtual learning.

- Complete the census.

- Vote.

- Provide funding for communities in high risk neighborhoods, especially those with children experiencing homelessness.
• Support shelters with funding for education pods or someone that can help support kids through virtual learning.

• Offer technology training for parents.

• Increase funding for programs and organizations like BELL and PEC that provide resources and enable families to get a head start.

Recommendations for Congress

• Congress must ensure that children experiencing homelessness are included and prioritized for help in ALL health care relief legislation. Young children experiencing homelessness were largely left out of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act.

• Support the Emergency Family Stabilization Act (EFSA), H.R. 7950, a bipartisan, bicameral legislation designed to meet the unique needs of families and youth experiencing homelessness under the broader education definition. It would create a new emergency funding stream for community-based organizations through the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) at the US Department of Health and Human Services, providing flexible funds that could be used for a wide variety of housing, health, education, and safety-related needs.

• The United States Senate could approve ‘Moving Forward Act, HR 2, expand Low Income Housing Tax Credits and provide funding for Community Development Block Grant.

• Making Housing Matters proposals need citizens’ support; see https://evans.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/evans-pushing-include-housing-covid-relief-deal

• Advance more than $100 billion to improve affordable housing infrastructure, starting with $70 billion for the public housing capital fund.

• Helping HOMES Act (H.R. 8003) to expand federal mortgage relief to cover all single-family mortgages, extending forbearance to the third of the market not covered under the CARES Act.

• Beyond COVID-19, we must work to align housing and early care systems in a way that directly addresses racial disparities, that reflects the actual lived experiences of families, that meets the urgent developmental needs of young children, and that provides the comprehensive supports that families need to thrive (beyond shelter
and housing). In our implementation and practice work, we see that sometimes the challenge is lack of resources, but not always. Lack of awareness and training, lack of oversight, lack of alignment, and policy conflicts also prevent communities from identifying and supporting these children and their parents.

- Systemic reforms are needed to remove systemic barriers. This means holding federal and state agencies accountable for providing oversight and robust implementation of existing federal law.

- Early childhood legislation should be amended to incentivize outreach, identification, and services for families experiencing homelessness, whether through weighted funding formulas, bonus points in application criteria, or other means. Just as school districts must designate a liaison for homeless students, so too could Head Start and other quality early childhood programs designate a point of contact for children experiencing homelessness and other mobile, vulnerable children.

- Finally, as long as the policy goals, definitions of homelessness, metrics, and data, and outcomes measures between housing and early childhood systems are at odds and even in conflict, there can be no true, lasting change for our most vulnerable families. Passing the Homeless Children and Youth Act, H.R. 2001, would align these systems by reforming HUD Homeless Assistance.

Conclusion

The Roundtable Discussion with Congressperson Dwight Evans helped identify more than 50 recommendations that can improve supports for families experiencing homelessness. PEC intends to address many of these recommendations for the next few years in hopes of influencing local, state, and federal strategies. With changes in leadership at the federal Administration and in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, PEC pledges to work with Congressman Evans, the panelists and its partners in the homeless housing and early learning systems to focus attention on young children experience in the upcoming years.
Acknowledgements

We thank Congressperson Dwight Evans for his leadership, and we thank our participants:

- Amanda Atkinson - Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC)
- Omari Baye - ACTS of the Apostle Emergency Housing Program
- Tracey Campanini - Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning
- Dr. JJ Cutuli - Nemours Children's Health System
- Tara Dechert - Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Policy Lab
- Kathy Desmond - People’s Emergency Center (PEC)
- Tracy Duarte - Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration Office
- Ineeze Gainey - Children's Playhouse and IAG Childcare Consulting
- Beth Gonzales - Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services
- Deborah Hartranft - School District of Philadelphia
- Charlene Heeney and Trina Williams - Health Federation of Philadelphia
- Patricia Julianelle - SchoolHouse Connection
- Sean Perkins - Philadelphia Office of Children and Families
- Rashanda Perryman - Vanguard Strong Start for Kids™
- Roslyn Robinson – Woodstock Family Center (RHD)
- Elliot Weinbaum - William Penn Foundation

We thank our funders, the Vanguard Strong Start for Kids, the William Penn Foundation, and the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, for their continued support.
Who We Are:

People’s Emergency Center (PEC) was founded in 1972 by volunteers to provide emergency shelter for people experiencing homelessness in their West Philadelphia neighborhood. The mission of PEC is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods, and drive change. We are committed to increasing equity and opportunity throughout our entire community. PEC’s Building Early Links for Learning (BELL) works to improve supports and access to high quality early childhood education (ECE) for young children experiencing family homelessness in Philadelphia’s emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing programs.

- Twitter: @PECCaresPhilly and #BELLPHL
- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesEmergencyCenter/](https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesEmergencyCenter/)
- YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/user/PECCaresPhilly](https://www.youtube.com/user/PECCaresPhilly)

People's Emergency Center

325 N. 39th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Telephone: 267-777-5880

Web: [www.pec-cares.org](http://www.pec-cares.org)

Text PECBELL to 844-961-3547 for notifications!