

HOMELESS FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 6, 1989

Reviewed by Board of Managers January 2010

- WHEREAS,** PTA Objects direct us to actively demonstrate concern for the overall welfare and well-being of children and families; and
- WHEREAS,** Families with children are the fastest-growing group of homeless nationally; and
- WHEREAS,** In California alone, it is estimated that 30% to 35% of people that are currently homeless are families with children under the age of 18, and this crisis affects thousands of children statewide and hundreds of thousands of children nationally; and
- WHEREAS,** Homelessness is devastating to the normal development and physical and mental health of a child and, for a variety of reasons, many homeless children are denied an education; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA seek and support legislation that will provide help for homeless families with children; and urge state PTAs to seek necessary amendments to state education codes to eliminate any and all legal barriers to homeless children and youth attending school; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA urge its constituent organizations to urge local school districts to implement guidelines such as those in the California State Department of Education's November 1988 Legal Advisory related to the McKinney Act, which requires the removal of any and all legal barriers to homeless children and youth attending school; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA continue to develop materials to inform and educate people about the plight of homeless families with children, and continue to urge its constituent organizations to help raise awareness of the problem in their schools and communities; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA urge its constituent organizations to work with appropriate agencies so they can help provide information to families in crisis and aid them in finding assistance before they become homeless.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

While statistical information varies about the homeless situation, all of what is known substantiates the belief that homeless families with children are the fastest growing group of homeless in our nation. There are various reasons for this, the major one being lack of low-income housing.

The effects of homelessness on children are devastating to their normal development and their physical and mental health. They experience more mental and behavioral problems as well as more

frequent unattended chronic disease, such as heart disease, neurologic problems and obesity. They also experience frequent acute problems such as developmental delay and school failure. Of all the population that suffers from homelessness, children are the most vulnerable. They do not understand what is happening to them and they are more easily affected by exposure to extreme amounts of stress, anxiety or even violence.

In addition to the overwhelming problems these children face, many of them are denied access to school. This situation often exists due to local interpretation of residency laws as well as guardianship laws. Few states have information on the homeless student population, and many have no plan or policy that ensures that these children receive an education. The only federal law that addresses the education issue is the *Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act*. Grants are set aside for every state even though states are not **required** to participate. Congress authorized funding for fiscal years 1987 and 1988. The Administration's FY 1989 budget request eliminates funding, contending that homeless children's educational needs will be met through **state** plans. Forty-one states have applied for grants.

A key factor in breaking the cycle of homelessness is legislation that would allow states and local jurisdictions to establish emergency shelters for families and more low-income housing; and that would eliminate state and local barriers to education access for homeless children. There also is a great need for intervention programs that would identify at-risk families and provide support services before such families become homeless. One expert working with homeless families believes that children growing up homeless will, in all probability, become dysfunctional adults, adversely affecting future generations.

PTA, as the nation's largest child advocacy organization, has a responsibility to help educate society about this problem, and to work toward solving it. Family homelessness is a multi-faceted problem requiring many solutions – PTA must be part of the process of ending this tragedy for so many children.