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HEADLINE: Rise In Homeless Students Becoming a National Concern



Rise in homeless students becoming a national concern

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A January 2008 study revealed that there are nearly 800,000 homeless Americans, according to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Of those 800,000 homeless people, roughly 40 percent or 300,000 consisted of families with minor children.

School officials and youth advocates across the nation are seeing a rapidly growing trend of homeless students in public schools. Experts suggest that this growing tendency will pose serious consequences for the public school system and the generation of the future.

Harvard Medical School professor and president of the National Center on Homelessness, Ellen Bassuk, declares that "Homeless children are confronted daily by extremely stressful and traumatic experiences that have profound effects on their cognitive development and ability to learn. They tend to have high rates of developmental delays, learning difficulties and emotional problems as a product of precarious living situations and extreme poverty."

Federal guidelines mandate that public schools take action to prevent homeless students from falling behind their peers academically. Such efforts may include a wide range of services, such as transportation, free lunch, immunizations and family services. However with inadequate federal funding and national budget cuts, many schools have difficulty meeting the increased needs of students who do not have a permanent residence.

The solution: increase federal funding allocated to the Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In 2008, the U.S. government designated approximately \$650 billion of tax payers' money for the Department of Defense, according to U.S. Senate Appropriation Bills and the Department of Treasury's Monthly Treasury Statement. In the same year, the U.S.

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government only allocated \$75 billion for the Department of Education, and \$50 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The U.S. government has a responsibility to ensure the well-being and security of its citizens and others who inhabit the land within the country's borders. The federal government also has a responsibility to provide care for those who cannot care for themselves. The Constitution grants Congress, which is thought to be more representative of the people, the power to raise and spend federal funds. However, it makes absolutely no sense for Congress to approve the spending of hundreds of billions of dollars to fight for citizens in other countries abroad, while turning its back to its own citizens at home.

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The homeless, especially those who are families with young children, should have unlimited access to the basic needs for survival. Shelter, food, healthcare and education all fit in the category of "basic needs."

There is ample research that indicates the negative impact of homelessness on adults, as well as children. Studies show that homelessness generally hinders children's ability to socialize and learn. Many suffer from hunger, exhaustion, abuse and insecurity, according to a 2009 MSNBC report. Homeless children have difficulties performing at grade level standards and are roughly 50 percent less likely to graduate from high school than their fellow classmates.

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