

# Youth Homelessness Advocacy Coalition

POWERED BY DC ACTION

April 23, 2021

Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

The Youth Homelessness Advocacy Coalition, powered by DC Action, would first like to thank you for your consistent work to prevent and end youth homelessness in the District. Under your leadership, DC has become [a national example](#) of best practice in setting and pursuing a robust strategy to end youth homelessness.

While much progress has been made, we still have a long way to go to ensure all our young people have safe housing and the support they need to make the successful transition to adulthood. Today we are writing to share our FY22 budget priorities, priorities we know will further our shared vision of a city where no young person lacks a safe and stable place to call home.

These requests have been developed collaboratively by our coalition partners with youth input. Our recommendations complement ongoing local and federal funding, and ultimately ensure we are investing in all parts of our system from prevention to long term intervention. We have included a brief summary of each recommendation below. If you would like greater detail we are happy to provide a copy of our full budget advocacy agenda.

## Stable, High Quality Services:

Maintain FY21 Funding Levels

\$21,000,000

The District has spent 10 years building one of the most robust responses to youth experiencing homelessness in the county; and while we still don't have enough resources, we're making a difference in the lives of over 1,400 young people each year. Any reduction in current funding, even contract savings, will have a direct and immediate impact on the quality and capacity of homeless youth services. Hold this funding harmless.

A Robust Cost Analysis of All Homeless Youth Services

\$75,000

Due to contracting and procurement processes, funding levels across the youth continuum of care vary depending on the provider: What one shelter location receives may vary drastically from another shelter- even if they serve the same population. This creates inconsistency in the quality and depth of services provided by various organizations. We - DHS and providers - need to have a shared understanding of what it costs to provide quality youth outreach, shelter and housing services.

We request one time funding to hire an external firm to complete a robust cost analysis of all homeless youth services. This analysis will help DHS and service providers budget programs effectively, will ensure adherence to the actual and intended program models, improve program consistency and quality, and ultimately, strengthen youth outcomes. The adult system recently completed a similar project for PSH programs. Our system would draw from the lessons learned in this effort to frame this project.

Filling System Gaps to Improve Outcomes:

Workforce Programming for Homeless Youth

\$574,000

If youth are going to retain stable housing and successfully exit our homelessness system, they need quality jobs with strong earning potential. Yet, at present, nearly 70% of DC's homeless youth report no cash income (YOUth Count 2019), meaning sustained independence is entirely out of reach.

While there are programs that can help youth develop critical soft skills, and gain basic credentials; there is a lack of job search, job match and job retention support available to our young people<sup>1</sup>. And services for adults through the Department of Employment Services are not a 1:1 fit for this population. A targeted investment that helps homeless youth make the link from soft skill or credential training to paid living wage employment would fill a major gap in our employment and homeless services systems; and help cut off the pipeline from youth to chronic adult homelessness.

Professional Development Fund

\$70,000

Best practice tells us that hiring from the community is important. It helps youth see near peer mentors that can frame their own pathway to independent adulthood. Unfortunately, there are limited capacity building or professional development resources to train young adults or other folks hired from the community. A modest annual investment to create a year long scaffolded training curriculum for folks hired from the youth community will strengthen programs, improve youth outcomes and ultimately build a pipeline of skilled youth development experts for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> It's important to note that the District has traditionally invested services in opportunity youth (a similar population), but this federal funding was reduced this year by roughly \$574,000. This request would restore that funding with local dollars and specifically target services to youth experiencing homelessness.

Investing in Prevention and Innovation:

Youth Mentoring Pilot Program

\$350,000

The youth in our homeless services system have been strongly advocating for long-term mentoring programs. They believe, and research bears this out, that access to mentors and supportive adults (that are separate and apart from their housing program) are integral to their ability to navigate the pathway to independence. We propose piloting a program similar to BEST KIDS (a mentor program available to children in CFSA) for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

This is the third year in a row our young people have proposed this program. After the trauma and uncertainty of the last year, we have to listen. They need this program now more than ever.

Mobile/Roaming Behavioral Health Team

\$558,000

A lack of accessible, youth friendly and culturally competent mental health services is a major barrier to long term stability for our youth. After 2 years of research, we propose the development of a mobile behavioral health team. Staffed by 3.5 clinicians and a full time psychiatrist (at minimum), this unit would rotate between homeless youth provider sites to provide medication management and initial mental health services on a weekly basis. If properly aligned with the Department of Behavioral Health, this program will facilitate pathways into the Department of Behavioral Health's funded community services that would then serve youth long term via CSAs.

We have to meet youth where they are, and in this case, that means literally bringing initial clinical services to where they physically congregate. This investment has the potential to dramatically increase youth access to trauma/ behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment, medication management, and long term mental health supports. All of which will decrease the likelihood of sustained or future homelessness.

PSH Set Aside for Youth In Adult System

\$345,000

The unfortunate reality is that between 8%-10% of the youth in our homeless youth services system will not be able to function independently when they age out of our youth system at the age of 25. Our youth with substantial clinical and behavioral health needs are the exception, not the norm.

Despite their extreme vulnerability, because of their age and relatively short duration of homelessness (compared to the adult system) this population of youth will not rise to the level of vulnerability needed to receive housing services in our adult system. Functionally, this means our most vulnerable and "at risk"

youth exit the youth system and then have to wait 5, 10 or 15 years before they can get support in the adult system. This service model is perpetuating our chronically homeless adult population.

If we are serious about ending the pipeline of chronic adult homelessness, we have to better serve our hyper vulnerable young people by ensuring a warm handoff from the youth system into the adult system. An annual set aside of 10 permanent supportive housing (PSH) units in our adult system to serve young people with deep and extensive needs is one strategy to do this.

We appreciate your time and consideration of these budget requests. Please know we're happy to discuss in further detail at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Covenant House Greater Washington  
DC Action  
DC Doors  
DC Fiscal Policy Institute  
Healthy Babies Projects  
HER Resiliency Center  
Latin American Youth Center  
National Center for Children and Families  
Sasha Bruce Youthworks  
SMYAL  
StandUp for Kids  
Wanda Alston Foundation