March 22, 2019

Assemblymember David Chiu
Chair, Assembly Committee on Housing and Community Development
1020 N Street, Room 162
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Assembly Bill 58 (L. Rivas)

Dear Assemblymember Chiu,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) Commission, we write in support of Assembly Bill 58, which would add the California Department of Education (CDE) to the state’s Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC).

LAHSA is a joint powers authority of the City and County of Los Angeles, and serves as the lead agency in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (CoC). LAHSA is responsible for funding a significant portion of the interim housing, permanent housing, and supportive services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.

On any given night, roughly 5,000 children aged 18 and under experience homelessness in Los Angeles County, living on the streets or in shelters, vehicles, and hotels and motels across the region. AB 58 recognizes the important role of the state’s education agency in coordinated efforts to reduce and end homelessness statewide. For school-aged children experiencing homelessness and their families, schools can offer an entryway to services and housing support that can shorten their length of homelessness and provide the stability foundational to their educational success.

The addition of the state’s education department embodies best practices in accordance with recommendations from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) on the inclusion of education bodies in the membership of state-level councils.¹ In recent years, federal and state lawmakers have increasingly recognized the responsibility school districts have in supporting young students at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, beginning with identifying and quickly assessing their immediate needs, and ensuring that students stay in the classroom during difficult housing transitions. This points to the growing recognition of the distinct toll that homelessness can take on students, academically as well as emotionally. Research finds that students experiencing homelessness not only exhibit lower academic performance, higher rates of absenteeism, and higher dropout rates than their housed peers, they also report being reluctant to disclose their housing situation out of stigma or fear of negative repercussions.²

As high numbers of families and children continue to face housing instability and homelessness, we are encouraged by statewide efforts to break through the siloed approaches to service delivery and create a coordinating body responsive to the distinct needs that exist in our homeless population. AB 58 is a valuable step in furthering that work.

We thank you for your leadership on this issue and look forward to continuing to work with the State Legislature toward reducing and ending homelessness among families and children in our communities.

Sincerely,

Kelli Bernard
Chair, LAHSA Commission

Peter Lynn
Executive Director