

## Revise the Definition of Homelessness

Inconsistent definitions of “homeless,” “homeless individual” and “homeless children and youth” at the state and federal levels often blocks access to services homeless families and children who lack adequate living accommodations need to end their homeless situation.

**Florida currently has two definitions** of homelessness - one used by DCF and the other by DOE.

**Florida’s homeless assistance funding** operates according to section 420.621, F.S. and **only targets SOME** of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. The majority of homeless children and youth are not covered by the current definition.\*

**Shelters** throughout the state are **consistently full** and the **majority do not serve families** with children. Those that do provide **shelter for families with children** usually have **lengthy waiting lists**.

*(DCF 2007 Annual Report on Homeless Conditions in Florida)*

**In order to protect their children** and to stay intact as a family, many homeless families seek to **avoid the streets and end up in overcrowded, unsafe and unstable situations** — living doubled up, in welfare motels and/or campgrounds situation.\*

The instability associated with these situations is **damaging to child and youth development**, destroying the structure, routine and consistency that are necessary for children and youth to grow healthy and thrive.\*

This definition change **will**:

- ◆ make it easier for families with children, and unaccompanied youth **to be served without having to first live on the street**, or in an emergency shelter before qualifying for services;
- ◆ **eliminate** the need to apply **different standards for eligibility for different state funded homeless programs and services**; and
- ◆ give communities, especially faith-based groups in and rural areas of the state, flexibility to **address the specific needs** of their homeless neighbors.\*

This definition change **will not**:

- ◆ include living arrangements which are **voluntary, cultural preferences and/or traditional networks of support**. These situations are **expressly excluded** from the revised definition;
- ◆ create new demand; it will merely provide a correct portrait of the current need and help communities target and more efficiently pool government and private funding to the needs of their community or
- ◆ promise all homeless men, women and children will receive services, but rather all would have access to programs and services as funding permits.\*

### SUPPORT:

**H.B. 241**, sponsored by Rep. Faye Culp

**S.B. 786**, sponsored by Sen. Victor Crist

*(See Text of Definition Revision on Other Side)*



**Recommend definition of “homeless” in section 420.621 F.S., be amended as follows:**

~~(6) (4) “Homeless,” applied to an individual, or “individual experiencing homelessness” means “Homeless”~~  
~~refers to an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes or an~~  
~~individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:~~

(a) Is sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason;

(b) Is living in a motel, hotel, travel trailer park, or camping ground due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations;

~~(c) Is living in an emergency or transitional shelter; A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill;~~

~~(b) An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or~~

~~(d) (e) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a publicly or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;~~

(e) Is living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, bus or train station, or similar setting; or

(f) Is a migratory individual who qualifies as homeless because he or she is living in circumstances described in paragraphs (a) – (e).

The ~~terms defined in this subsection do term~~ does not refer to any individual imprisoned or otherwise  
~~detained pursuant to state or federal law. The terms also do not include individuals or families who are~~  
sharing housing due to cultural preferences, voluntary arrangements, and traditional networks of support.  
The terms include an individual who has been released from jail, prison, the juvenile justice system, the child  
welfare system, a mental health or developmental disability facility, a residential addiction treatment program,  
or a hospital, for whom no subsequent residence has been identified, and who lacks the resources and  
support network to obtain housing.