



# 2017 GOVERNMENT RELATIONS BRIEFING:

## YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

SEPTEMBER 8, 2017 • WYNDHAM GRAND HOTEL DOWNTOWN

### SETTING THE STAGE

HCEF Executive Director Carlos T. Carter explained the “why” behind the meeting: HCEF is all about creating hope through learning to level the playing field for youth experiencing homelessness. He shared his personal connection to the mission, reflecting on when his family opened their home to a young woman experiencing homelessness. Carter urged attendees to approach the day’s sessions through the lens of improvement. What can you do to improve your work to best impact and serve families and children experiencing homelessness? Carter ended by referring the audience to HCEF’s upcoming [31 Days of Hope](#) campaign, a slate of events throughout the month of October to build awareness and learning around issues of homelessness.

Michael Brown, a student at Dartmouth College, described his own experiences with homelessness and his perspective on what the system needs to do better to serve youth experiencing homelessness. He stressed the importance of understanding the unique challenges that students experiencing homelessness face. Service providers should not jump to conclusions about what students need or how best to support them, but should instead listen and give careful consideration to the various barriers individual students may be coming up against. For example, Brown talked about the significant barriers to seeking out and receiving services that homeless youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ often face. “One arrest could have changed my trajectory,” he said, and often does change the trajectories of youth of color experiencing homelessness. Basically, he said, what our students need is more support. Despite his individual success, he said, “The system did very little for me,” and hundreds of students simply slip through the cracks. There needs to be more funding and flexibility for organizations that provide services for homeless youth, more supports for students applying to and enrolled in college. And the mindset around the education of homeless youth needs to change, Brown said, from just providing the bare minimum kids need to helping all kids excel, thrive, and achieve their dreams.

**‘I WANT YOU TO SIT BACK. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE YOUR STOMACH IS ON FIRE. IMAGINE IT IS 5PM AND YOU HAVEN’T HAD ANYTHING TO EAT TODAY. THE LIBRARY ANNOUNCES THAT THEY’LL BE CLOSING IN 5 MINUTES AND FOR A MOMENT YOU CAN’T BREATHE BECAUSE IT IS LESS THAN TEN DEGREES OUTSIDE AND YOU DON’T KNOW WHERE YOU WILL GO...THE PRESSURE IS UNBELIEVABLE. BUT YOU HAVE GOT TO GET YOURSELF TOGETHER... SO YOU TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND SHOVE DOWN THAT GNAWING FEAR. GRAB A SANDWICH FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES AND FALL ASLEEP ALONE IN THE BACK OF THE LAUNDRY MAT.’**

[Read the rest of Michael’s presentation.](#)

Kevin Jenkins, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Manchester Bidwell Corporation, greeted attendees and previewed the schedule for the morning, outlining its purpose.

**PURPOSE:** to bring colleagues together who have a common interest in collectively advocating for the educational advancement and well-being of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Participants will:

1. Become familiar with the dynamics of the 115th congress in Washington, D.C., the shift of leadership in the state legislature, and the prospects and challenges of the governor’s 2017 state budget.
2. Better understand the opportunities to shape programming and related opportunities for children and youth experiencing homelessness in the nation as a whole, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in general, and specifically Allegheny County public schools and ACDHS program.
3. Be invited to become engaged in shaping the policy outcomes at the national, state, and local levels regarding the education and related issues of children and youth experiencing homelessness from birth to age 24 through a statewide coalition. - #PAHomelessYouth.
4. Be prepared to implement the federally mandated Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.



L to R: Dr. Joe Lagana, Carlos T. Carter, Joe Zewe, Harry Soose, and Kevin Jenkins.



L to R: Carlos T. Carter, Barbara Duffield, Trish Andrews



Senator Jay Costa



L to R: Ron Cowell and Dr. Joe Lagana

## FEDERAL UPDATES

Barbara Duffield, Founder and Executive Director of [SchoolHouse Connection](#), gave participants an overview of current federal legislative efforts to combat homelessness. She started by providing some context: on a national as well as a state level in Pennsylvania, numbers of homeless youth are increasing. This is due in part to the fact that schools are now better able to identify students experiencing homelessness, but actual numbers are also likely going up. Fortunately, despite the increasingly partisan nature of Congressional politics, homelessness is not a particularly partisan issue and there is support on both sides of the aisle for addressing it. To take action on the federal budget, Duffield encouraged attendees to get involved with and sign up for the e-newsletters of the [Children's Budget Coalition](#) and [Non-Defense Discretionary United](#), two coalitions that advocate for federal spending on programs related to homelessness.

Duffield spoke about pending legislation that relates to homelessness and youth experiencing homelessness: hurricane relief spending, the [Career and Technical Education Act](#), bills related to access to higher education, reintroduction of the [Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act](#), and the [Homeless Children and Youth Act](#). (For more detailed information, see Duffield's presentation slides and the [Policy Updates](#) page on the SchoolHouse Connection website.) Duffield also referenced two reports: "[Higher Education: Actions Needed to Improve Access to Federal Financial Assistance for Homeless and Foster Youth](#)", a Government Accountability Office report on the barriers that make it more difficult for students experiencing homelessness or in foster care to pursue post-secondary education; and "[Citizen-Centric Advocacy](#)", a Congressional Management Foundation report that explains how people can most effectively take action to influence their elected representatives.

## STATE UPDATES

Echoing the takeaways Duffield shared from "Citizen-Centric Advocacy", Pennsylvania Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa emphasized that personal stories from constituents are hugely important for influencing the decisions of policymakers. Costa went on to outline the current state of affairs of the Pennsylvania budget process. Pennsylvania is required to maintain a balanced budget, and while the governor and legislature crafted a modest budget with, among other things, funding for job creation programs and education, a \$2 billion shortfall remains. A revenue proposal is currently languishing in the House, and if a solution is not reached by September 15, that \$2 billion may be cut from the general fund, likely resulting in a 12% reduction of education funding (in addition to cuts to higher education, mental health services, homeless support, and others). For more information on the budget, visit the [Pennsylvania Office of the Budget website](#) and the [Budget Impasse Q&A page](#).

## RESOURCES

[MICHAEL BROWN'S PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT](#)

[FEDERAL: BARBARA DUFFIELD'S PRESENTATION](#)

[STATE: RON COWELL'S PRESENTATION](#)

Ron Cowell, President of the [Education Policy and Leadership Center](#), followed up the discussion of the Pennsylvania budget with some historical context about how the state's finances ended up where they are now. The problem of state government funding is a long-term one, Cowell said. Education funding (including higher education) was cut by \$1.3 billion in 2010 and 2011, with the largest cuts affecting the poorest school districts, and years later, these cuts have yet to be restored. While Pennsylvania ranks 9th in the nation for per-pupil spending, that ranking is a statewide average that masks the extreme gaps between low- and high-income districts. When it comes to the share of total education revenue that comes from the state, Pennsylvania ranks near the bottom. Instead, schools in Pennsylvania are highly dependent on funding from local property taxes, which exacerbates the inequities between districts. There is some hope for change on this issue, as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court may take up pending litigation from plaintiffs claiming that the Pennsylvania school funding system is inequitable. Cowell noted that attendees should keep an eye on how Pennsylvania plans to implement the new federal [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, replacing the previous version of the law known as No Child Left Behind. (See [Pennsylvania's draft plan here](#).) Cowell said that the Pennsylvania general assembly has only a handful of public education advocates, and conflicting views about the purpose of public education and the role of government in education make consensus-building difficult. However, as a result of advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local level, policymakers at the state level are now much more aware of issues related to homelessness and education for youth experiencing homelessness.

# REGIONAL UPDATES: 'HOMELESSNESS, A RARE AND NON-OCCURRING INCIDENT'

Policymakers at the local level are increasingly focused on homelessness as well, due to the influence of coalitions like the [Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board](#), a public/private partnership devoted to reviewing programs and policies in the region. Jane Downing, Senior Program Officer at the Pittsburgh Foundation, discussed HAB's 2015 strategic planning effort to identify activities and strategies to end homelessness by 2020, specifically among veterans, families, and unaccompanied youth. The recommendations that came out of this planning were:

1. To increase and expand outreach to people experiencing homelessness, particularly to youth and the LGBTQ+ community
2. To develop connections and relationships between government agencies and other community resources and providers (for example, bringing together relevant stakeholders in our public schools to better coordinate transportation for homeless youth).

Downing also noted that the Allegheny County Department of Human Services recently kicked off its efforts to end and prevent youth homelessness, beginning with brainstorming and education sessions to identify gaps and needs.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

RON COWELL, BARBARA DUFFIELD, NICOLE ANDERSON (AIU), MICHAEL BROWN, & JANE DOWNING

### Q: We're struggling with funding. What about using the state lottery as a source of revenue for schools?

*Cowell said it's a great idea, but not going to happen. When the lottery began in Pennsylvania, the promise was that it would benefit senior citizen programs and some people with disabilities. The legislature has no appetite for walking back that commitment to senior citizens.*

### Q: Career and technical education is a stated priority at the national and state level, but it hasn't gotten more money from the state. How is that going to work?

*Cowell said there's no real answer. We really need to think about how to pay for career and technical education programs especially in less-resourced districts.*

### Q: What about school district consolidation as a way to save money? Is it a good idea or a bad one?

*Cowell answered that it's crazy that we have 43 districts in Allegheny County. It exacerbates the gaps between have and have-not districts. There's no motivation at the state level to force it down from there. What's more likely to happen is functional consolidation (not structural consolidation) - intermediate units, for example, that provide a way to collaborate and share resources.*

### Q: Why is there so much disparity/inequity in funding?

*Cowell answered that state money is supposed to help level the playing field, with more money going to poorer districts. When state funding goes down, the greatest harm happens to the poorest districts; they are less likely to be able to make up the shortfall with local taxes. Pennsylvania had a good formula in the 70s and 80s, but being "cheap" at the state level undermined it. And the state is still being cheap with education today.*

### Q: We've talked today about a lot of insurmountable challenges. What is one thing we could walk away with today that we could do and make a big impact on the kids we're trying to serve?

*Brown suggested two things: first, approach the students you serve from a position of compassion and understanding, without assuming a lot about them. Think carefully about how you approach them. Secondly, the BigBurgh app is great, so send your kids there. It's a directory of free services in the city, and it's immediate (don't need a referral or appointment). Even to get the most basic needs met, you often need to wait, and kids get frustrated. [BigBurgh](#) provides direct connections to services.*

## PRESENTATION OF THE PEGGY NEAL UNSUNG HEROINE AWARD

Anna Kudrav, Assistant Police Chief of the City of Pittsburgh, was presented with the Peggy Neal Unsung Heroine Award, which honors members from the community who are everyday heroes for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Carlos T. Carter and Joseph Lagana of the Homeless Children's Education Fund thanked Ms. Kudrav for her tireless work to build relations between the police and the community, particularly those who are experiencing housing instability. Ms. Kudrav serves on the Homeless Outreach Coordination Committee, the 412 Youth Zone Advisory Committee, and Allegheny County's Homeless Advisory Board. She was also instrumental to the development and implementation of the BigBurgh.com technology. Ms. Kudrav was accompanied by Pittsburgh police officers, who she in turn thanked for their efforts to provide hope and support to youth experiencing homelessness.



Anna Kudra (center), pictured with Don Neal (left) and Joe Lagana (right), received the Peggy Neal Unsung Heroine Award. Margaret ("Peggy") Neal was a writer, educator, and longtime friend of HCEF. She is fondly remembered for her quiet yet resonant leadership style, her compassion, and her creativity.



## PANEL DISCUSSION (CONT.)

### Q (cont.): What is one thing we could walk away with today that we could do and make a big impact on the kids we're trying to serve?

Anderson said to build relationships and break down the stigma of homelessness. Build a better understanding of the challenges families are dealing with.

Duffield said something we can work to change is the feeling and often reality that the public doesn't care about homelessness. In our everyday interactions with everyone (family, friends, clients, etc.), we need to make an effort to break down the stereotypes and stigma of homelessness (e.g., hearus.us).

Downing suggested asking students what they need. Don't make assumptions about their needs and wishes.

### Q: Imagine you're on an elevator with the governor. What do you say to him about homelessness?

Brown said homelessness is not a one-part problem. It's not just the lack of a safe place to stay. It's multifaceted and affected by all kinds of factors. So when you're talking about a marginalized community or making policy that affects them, you have to think very carefully about all the reasons why homeless people may not be coming forward. Or why they may not be able to access the help that they need that you are trying to provide.

Anderson stated that last year, we identified 4,700 children experiencing homelessness (AIU Region 4). Whatever federal funding we have or receive is never enough. We do not have the resources we need even to just build awareness let alone provide sufficient quality services to an expanding population of youth experiencing homelessness.

Duffield provided two slogans: Education ends homelessness. Let's put people (not housing) first. (What are their unique needs?)

Downing said we need funds for coordination. All the issues are multifaceted, and many different groups act on the same issues. We need resources to bring people/agencies/systems together.

## SUMMIT V.5 UPDATE & CLOSING

Chris McAneny, HEN and Teen Program Manager at HCEF, gave a brief update on the HCEF's "Summit VII.5" convened last May to explore how technology can support homeless youth. At that meeting, an action plan was drafted. In the weeks ahead, HCEF will be putting together a training program to support individual youth currently facing housing instability and homelessness, to promote BigBurgh among their peers and to create Safe Places for students to access resources through BigBurgh. HCEF is grateful for the support from AT&T, Highmark Health, and People's Natural Gas to bring this innovative pilot program to our county.



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