

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 11, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear President Biden and Secretary Cardona,

Thank you for your commitment to serving students, teachers, and school communities. As you know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) eviction moratorium that lapsed on July 31, 2021 went without federal intervention until three days later on Tuesday evening. In that time, thousands of families across the nation received eviction notices.¹ Children are a risk factor for eviction; therefore, the issue must be of great concern to all education leaders at all levels of government.

Housing insecurity exposes our children to adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, which are linked to at least five of the top ten leading causes of death.² Unfortunately, housing security is but one of many vulnerabilities that disproportionately threatens Black and Brown families. Immunocompromised status, food insecurity, loss of a primary caregiver, and mental health issues will also negatively impact children this fall and beyond. It is fundamental that we do everything to empower our schools with the resources necessary to be holistic systems of care that are responsive to the needs of the whole child – this must include using all available resources and networks to keep students and their families safe and in their homes.

A necessary precondition to connecting families to available supports is knowing who is vulnerable and where they are. It’s the only way to ensure that vulnerable families get served. First, our schools need systems in place to inventory the vulnerabilities and needs of students and families, and to update those inventories in real time. Second, we need to provide necessary additional support and staffing to our schools. Third, we need to support interagency

¹ See “[The COVID-19 Eviction Crisis: an Estimated 30-40 Million People in America Are at Risk](#)” for further details on the renters facing eviction in the period of the lapsed eviction moratorium.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces/index.html>

collaboration and strong community partnerships so that students and families are connected to resources and supports in a timely fashion. Elevating the full-service community school model, providing much-needed technical assistance, and identifying best-practices responsive to the impact of COVID-19 is key to serving our students.

A nationwide eviction crisis is a significant threat to a safe and sustainable return to in-person learning. Until there is a comprehensive, lasting policy solution to housing insecurity in our nation, temporary eviction moratoriums are lifesaving albeit temporary fixes. The shorter and more restrictive they are, the less meaningful. The 60-day eviction moratorium extension with tighter restrictions is a positive development in that it will ensure many – though not all – children and their families can stay in their homes. However, it also means that only a few short weeks after students return to school, our nation will be facing an eviction crisis again. It is imperative that our schools are prepared to support students and families.

There was a housing crisis prior to COVID-19. In New York City, particularly parts of the Bronx, one out of ten children in public schools were homeless before the pandemic.³ In Missouri, there were upwards of 30,000 unhoused students, and undoubtedly thousands more who face housing insecurity throughout the year in 2019.⁴ In Michigan, 34,853 students experienced homelessness in the 2018-19 school year⁵, and undercounting is a significant issue specifically in Detroit, which underscores the necessity for ongoing needs-mapping that can be updated in real-time. 17,071 students experienced homelessness in the 2018-19 school year in Minnesota, and out of 2,910 unhoused high school seniors, only 1,415 graduated.⁶ 24,658 students experienced homelessness in the 2018-19 school year in Massachusetts.⁷ As policymakers, we have a duty to develop and implement policies that will minimize the negative impact of housing insecurity on students, their families, and our school community. The community school model, which is particularly well-suited to respond to the negative impacts of COVID-19, is an evidence-based approach that can address the whole child and support needs assessments and networks of community partnerships.

A rise in evictions correlates with a rise in positive COVID-19 cases, and the single biggest predictor of an eviction is there being a child in the household.⁸ Children under age 12, who are not eligible for vaccinations, are more likely to contract and subsequently spread COVID-19 if they are evicted. Black single mothers are evicted at disproportionate rates, so every time an

³ Amin, Reema. 2020. “NYC is home to more than 111,000 homeless students, new data shows”. *Chalkbeat New York*. <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/12/3/22151208/nyc-is-home-to-more-than-111000-homeless-students-new-data-shows>

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. 2019. “2019 American Community Survey” <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=-00%20-%20All%20available%20races%3AAge%20and%20Sex%3AIncome%20and%20Poverty&g=0400000US29.50016&tid=ACSSPPIY2019.S0201>

⁵ National Center for Homeless Education. April 2021. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-16.17-to-18.19-Final.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Desmond, Matthew et al. 2013. “Evicting Children.” *Social Forces*. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/social_forces-2013-desmond-303-27.pdf

eviction moratorium lapses for even one day, it disproportionately exposes Black children to ACEs and disproportionately harms Black mothers.⁹

ACEs are preventable and our schools are uniquely positioned to reduce harm and keep our students housed. When a child’s family has mounting rent debt in the face of an iterative eviction crisis, they should be immediately connected to a school-based social worker and referred for services that prioritize keeping the student and their family in their home. In the Bronx, 24 percent of tenants have accumulated more than \$4000 in rent debt, and in Westchester County, a fifth of tenants have accumulated more than \$5000 in rent debt.¹⁰ 11.8 percent of renters in Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, owe an average of \$3,909 in back rent.¹¹ 17.5 percent of renters owe approximately \$3,112 in Wayne County, which includes Detroit.¹² 14.2 percent of renters in St. Louis County owe back rent of approximately \$3,167.¹³ St. Louis County alone has filed nearly 8,500 evictions since the start of the pandemic, leaving thousands vulnerable to chronic housing insecurity.¹⁴ 11.8 percent of renters in Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, owe an average of \$3,909 in back rent.¹⁵ 17.5 percent of renters owe approximately \$3,112 in Wayne County, which includes Detroit.¹⁶ 20.9 percent of rents in Queens owe an average of \$5,402 in back rent.¹⁷ 10.6 percent of renters in Middlesex County, which includes Cambridge, are, on average, \$5,475 behind on rent.¹⁸ In the richest nation in the world, we have an abundance of resources, but these resources need to be equitably distributed and well-coordinated. For example, there are billions available nationwide in emergency rental assistance, but only a fraction of the aid has reached landlords.¹⁹ This relief can support the millions of households that have accumulated rent debt throughout the course of the pandemic, and schools could be leveraged to connect families struggling to keep up with rent to this important resource.

This moment calls for the urgent recognition that schools can be community hubs with strong, responsive networks of support in place across multiple agencies and community-based partners.

⁹ Covert, Bryce. 2021. “Why Landlords Target Mothers for Eviction.” *The New Republic*.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/161578/landlords-target-mothers-eviction-crisis-covid>; Desmond, Matthew. 2014. “How Poor Black Women are Evicted at Alarming Rates, Setting Off a Chain of Hardship.” *How Housing Matters*. https://www.macfound.org/media/files/hhm_-_poor_black_women_are_evicted_at_alarming_rates.pdf

¹⁰ Sgaier, Sema K. and A. Dibner-Dunlap. 2021. “How many People are at Risk of Losing Their Homes in Your Neighborhood.” *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/opinion/covid-eviction-moratorium.html?partner=slack&smid=sl-share>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Haughey, John. 2021. “As 200,000 face eviction, Missouri sitting on \$560M in federal rental aid.” *The Center Square*. https://www.thecentersquare.com/missouri/as-200-000-face-eviction-missouri-sitting-on-560m-in-federal-rental-aid/article_b1216000-f4a9-11eb-8e47-cfe772f4260a.html

¹⁵ Sgaier, Sema K. and A. Dibner-Dunlap. 2021. “How many People are at Risk of Losing Their Homes in Your Neighborhood.” *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/opinion/covid-eviction-moratorium.html?partner=slack&smid=sl-share>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Siegel, Rachel. 2021. ‘Five-alarm fire’: Slow trickle of rental aid heightens concern about eviction crisis.” *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/07/07/rental-aid-eviction-moratorium-housing/>

The actions and investments necessary to put this into place are allowable under the flexibility of the Department of Education’s (the Department) guidance for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021, Public Law 117-2, which Congress passed and President Biden signed into law this past March. We thank you for your leadership in issuing guidance on how to use American Rescue Plan funding to support the full-service community school approach, which highlights the necessity of partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to meet the social, emotional, physical, mental health, and academic needs of students.

We ask that the Department update its guidance to elevate the importance of equipping all schools as systems of public care with comprehensive, holistic needs mapping and interagency collaboration. The full-service community school model has shown promising outcomes, but there are too few in existence. Between 2010 and 2018, there were 47 Full-Service Community Schools grants awarded by the Department.²⁰ Compared to the nearly 100,000 public schools in the country, we know that the vast majority of schools have not received funds to establish and implement the community school model and would likely need technical assistance for standing up these efforts for the first time.

The urgency for needs mapping and interagency collaboration spans several intersecting issues. In addition to the housing crisis that predates the pandemic, the number of children who are facing food insecurity, grieving the loss of a caregiver, and experiencing the isolation of being disconnected from in-person learning for an extended period of time has skyrocketed. Without reliably updated systems in place to identify emerging student needs in real-time, students and their families can suffer in isolation. Without strong networks of support in place, students and families are at risk of losing out on lifesaving resources. It may be an allowable use of ESSER funds now, but in this dire moment, comprehensive needs mapping and interagency collaboration is a necessity that many schools will need support in implementing.

Given the revolving nature of the eviction crisis that impacts students nationwide, we request the Department respond to the following inquiries at its earliest availability.

1. With the extension of the lapsed eviction moratorium limited to 60 days, what steps is the Department taking to ensure that ESSER guidance is updated to reflect the urgency of the forthcoming nationwide eviction crisis?
2. What steps has the Department taken, or will the Department take, to provide technical assistance to schools that have never implemented a full-service community school approach to ensure students’ and families’ needs, including housing security, are met?

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education. “Awards - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.” Accessed <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs/awards>

3. What if any subsequent guidance outside of the ESSER funds is the Department planning to issue jointly with other agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and any other relevant agencies that should be coordinating with the Department on meeting the needs of the whole child?

4. Per the statement issued by President Biden on Monday, August 2, 2021, which urged federal agencies to reexamine whether there are any other authorities to take additional actions to stop evictions, what steps is the Department taking to reexamine, identify, and act upon any relevant authorities to ensure all members of school communities remain housed?

We look forward to our continued partnership and rigorous efforts in finding solutions to these challenges before us.

Sincerely,



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



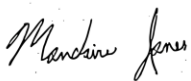
Ilhan Omar
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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Treasury

The Honorable Marcia Fudge, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development

The Honorable Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Honorable Deanne Criswell, FEMA Administrator