

SENATE BILL 2591

By Yarbro

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49  
and Title 71, relative to the Homeless Student  
Stability and Opportunity Gap Act.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 1, is amended by adding the following language as a new part:

**49-1-1301.** This part shall be known and may be cited as the "Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act."

**49-1-1302.** It is the legislative intent that the grant created pursuant to this part be used to ensure housing stability for homeless students, improve academic achievement for homeless students, and provide resources for homeless students in LEAs to assist in securing housing, improving academic achievement, and remaining in school.

**49-1-1303.**

As used in this part:

(1) "Homeless students" means students without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

(2) "Unaccompanied homeless student" means a student who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and is a homeless student as defined by subdivision (1); and

(3) "Very low-income household" means an unaccompanied youth and either family or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than fifty percent (50%) of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the grant recipient is located.

**49-1-1304.**

(a) Subject to funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the department of education shall create a grant program to increase identification of homeless students and to provide housing support for homeless students. The grant shall be used to enable LEAs receiving grants to assist homeless students and their families by providing help finding and funding stable housing and by adding homeless student liaison positions to work directly with homeless students.

(b) Grants provided by this program may be used to provide assistance to homeless students or students from very low-income households in various ways including, but not limited to:

(1) Rental assistance, including utilities, security and utility deposits, first and last month's rent, rental application fees, moving expenses, and other eligible expenses to be determined by the department;

(2) Transportation assistance, including gasoline assistance for families with vehicles and bus passes;

(3) Emergency shelter; and

(4) Housing stability case management.

(c) Any LEA receiving a grant pursuant to this part shall create the position of a homeless student liaison to help students receiving assistance in accordance with this part. The department shall provide training and instruction to persons serving as the LEA's homeless student liaison so that they may be effective in serving homeless students.

(d) Any LEA receiving a grant that has identified more than ten (10) unaccompanied youth must establish in each middle school and high school a point of contact who is responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting those students to the LEA's homeless student liaison. Points of contact must

be appointed by the principal of the school. The LEA homeless student liaison shall train and provide instruction to points of contact.

(e) The first grants under this program shall be awarded for the 2019-2020 school year.

**49-1-1305.**

(a) The department shall create an application process for LEAs to apply for the grant.

(b) Award criteria for the grant must be based on the LEA's demonstrated need to assist homeless students and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children enrolled in the LEA and the LEA's ability to meet needs of homeless children. Preference shall be given to LEAs that demonstrate a commitment to serving the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth.

(c) Applications for the grant program must include contractual agreements between housing providers, as approved by the department, and LEAs defining the responsibilities and commitments of each party to identify, house, and support homeless students.

(d) The department shall award no more than fifteen (15) grants to LEAs per school year. No more than five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) shall be granted to an LEA per school year under this part. An LEA receiving a grant shall provide no more than one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) of grant money to an individual school per school year.

(e) An LEA must reapply for the grant each year that the LEA wishes to receive the grant.

(f) The department shall define student eligibility to receive assistance under the grant program. Eligible students receiving assistance from an LEA through the grant

program are eligible to receive assistance until the student no longer needs financial assistance for housing, the student moves out of the LEA's boundaries, or the student graduates from high school.

(g) LEAs shall not use funds allocated under this section to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless students.

(h) Nothing in this part prohibits LEAs from receiving other federal or state funding for homeless students.

**49-1-1306.**

(a) By July 1, 2019, the department, in collaboration with experts from community organizations on homelessness and the department of human services, shall create a brochure with information on how to recognize signs that indicate a student may be homeless, how to provide services and support to homeless students, and why this identification and support is critical to student success. The brochure shall be posted on the department's website.

(b) By July 1, 2019, the department shall adopt and distribute to each LEA, best practices for choosing and training homeless student liaisons.

(c) On an annual basis, an LEA receiving a grant must strongly encourage all school staff to review the brochure created pursuant to subsection (a). The LEAs shall require a homeless student liaison and any point of contact to review the brochure at least annually.

(d) An LEA receiving a grant shall provide students, at the beginning of the school year or at enrollment, information about services and support for homeless students. LEAs receiving grants may use the brochure posted on the department website as a resource. Schools are strongly encouraged to use a variety of

communications each year to notify students and families about services and support available to them if they experience homelessness, including, but not limited to:

- (1) Distributing and collecting an annual housing intake survey;
- (2) Providing parent brochures directly to students and families;
- (3) Announcing the information at school-wide assemblies; or
- (4) Posting information on the LEA's website or linking to the

department's website.

**49-1-1307.** Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, the department shall evaluate any LEA program receiving a grant pursuant to this part at least once every two (2) years. The department shall evaluate the process used by the LEA to identify and reach out to homeless students, assessment data and other indicators to determine how well the LEA is meeting the academic needs of homeless students, LEA expenditures used to expand opportunities for these students, and the academic progress of students receiving assistance from the grant.

**49-1-1308.**

(a) During each school year, LEAs receiving grants must measure how often each student changes residences, what services provided pursuant to this part were accessed by families or unaccompanied youth, and whether a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year. The LEA shall further measure the overall academic performance of students receiving assistance pursuant to this part and the ability of those students to maintain regular school attendance and to remain in school. The LEA shall provide the information to the department by June 30 of each year.

(b) By February 1, 2022, and each year thereafter, the department shall report to the education committee of the senate and the education administration and planning

committee of the house of representatives the following data for homeless students of all LEAs:

- (1) The number of identified homeless students enrolled in public schools;
- (2) The number of identified unaccompanied homeless students enrolled in public schools; and
- (3) The academic performance and educational outcomes of homeless students and unaccompanied homeless students, including but not limited to the following performance and educational outcomes:
  - (A) Student scores on the state standardized assessments;
  - (B) English language proficiency;
  - (C) Dropout rates;
  - (D) Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate;
  - (E) Five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate;
  - (F) Absenteeism rates and dropout rates;
  - (G) Truancy rates, if available;
  - (H) Suspension and expulsion data; and
  - (I) The overall housing stability of families receiving funding from the grant provided pursuant to the grant program.

(c) The data reported under this section must include state and LEA-level information and must be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, income level, English language learners, migrant, special education, and gender.

**49-1-1309.** The office of research and accountability (OREA) in the office of the comptroller of the treasury, with the assistance of the department of education, shall study the grant program created pursuant to this part and shall report on the overall effectiveness of the

grant program. In its report, OREA shall make findings as to whether the grant program is effective in decreasing homelessness for unaccompanied homeless students and the overall effectiveness of LEA homeless student liaisons in assisting such students in achieving housing stability. OREA shall make recommendations as to the potential of expanding the grant program and shall submit its report to the education committee of the senate and the education administrative and planning committee of the house of representatives by February 1, 2022.

SECTION 2. This act shall not be construed to be an appropriation of funds, and no funds shall be obligated or expended pursuant to this act unless the funds are specifically appropriated by the general appropriations act.

SECTION 3. The state board of education is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate the purposes of this act. The rules shall be promulgated in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.