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Before the
Committee on Financial Services
United States House of Representatives

Public Testimony
"Homeless in America: Examining
the Crisis and Solutions to End Homelessness"

Chairwoman Waters, Ranking Member McHenry, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Homelessness in America: Examining the Crisis and Solutions to End Homelessness. My name is Justin Rush, and I currently serve as the Director of Public Policy at the True Colors Fund, Co-Founded in 2008 by Cyndi Lauper, which works to prevent and end homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, seeking to create a world where all young people can be their true selves. To put our mission into action, the True Colors Fund provides training and education opportunities for communities and service providers, engages members of congress, state houses, federal and state agencies, and authentically collaborates with youth who have experienced homelessness to provide innovative solutions to addressing the youth homelessness crisis.

Consideration of the issue of homelessness in the United States could not be more timely, particularly as it pertains to our nation's most impacted. An estimated 4.2 million youth and young adults up to age 24 experience homelessness each year in the United States. Annually, one in 30 youth ages 13 to 17 and one in 10 young adults ages 18 to 25 endure some form of homelessness.¹ LGBTQ youth have a 120% increased risk of experiencing homelessness compared to youth who identify as heterosexual and cisgender. African American youth are also overrepresented, with an 83% increased risk of experiencing homelessness over youth of other races or ethnicities. Additionally, Latino and Latina youth make up 33% of 18- to 25-year-olds reporting homelessness. African American youth—especially young men aged 18 to 25—who identify as LGBTQ reported the highest rates of homelessness. Nearly one in four African American young men, ages 18 to 25, identifying as LGBTQ reported homelessness in the last 12 months.² Such findings are consistent with the disparities that have been found among in-school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement.³

According to our service provider report, LGBTQ youth made up 33% of young people accessing homeless services.⁴ LGBTQ youth of color—particularly transgender youth of

¹ Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America*. National estimates. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

² *Id.*, see also Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

³ *Id.* at *Missed Opportunities*.

⁴ Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M., Shelton, J., & Gates, G. (2015). *Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund.

color—are more likely to experience violent crime, including sexual assault, police violence, robbery, and murder.⁵ Homelessness makes them even more prone to experiencing these traumatic events. Additionally, LGBTQ youth of color are vulnerable to discrimination in education, employment, housing, and more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Institutional racism, homophobia, and transphobia contributes to pathways into homelessness for these young people, and it stymies their ability to exit homelessness.⁶

Furthermore, transgender people report high rates of discrimination that contribute to their housing instability which also deters them from accessing services, with - according to one study - nearly a quarter of transgender adults surveyed (N=27,715) reporting experiencing housing discrimination related to their gender identity. Providers are also more likely to report longer periods of homelessness for the transgender youth they serve.⁷

We are thankful to the committee for undertaking legislation that seeks to address the homelessness crisis within our country. Specifically, we support the Ending Homelessness Act of 2019, which would amend the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to make significant additional appropriations available for emergency relief grants, rental assistance for households and individuals who are experiencing homelessness, and homelessness outreach and coordination services. The bill also permanently authorizes the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, which has been integral in coordinating our nation's response to homelessness.

Conclusion

We have the opportunity today, as a nation, to effectively address and ultimately end youth homelessness. Experience has shown that when Congress invests in efficient and effective homeless assistance, as it does through CoCs, federal dollars are subsequently leveraged to great effect by community leadership and local dollars. As a result of these investments, we have seen remarkable nationwide progress toward ending homelessness when our efforts are targeted. To be certain: preventing and ending homelessness means that Congress should ensure equal access to HUD-funded programs by providing legal protections based on one's sexual orientation and gender identity and ensuring that all

⁵ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP). (2016). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2016*. New York, NY: Emily Waters.

⁶ Price, C., Wheeler, C., Shelton, J., & Maury, M. (Eds.). (2016). *At the Intersections: A collaborative report on LGBTQ youth homelessness*. True Colors Fund and the National LGBTQ Task Force.

⁷ James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality

Continuum of Care providers receive training for LGBTQ culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services for those most impacted by the homelessness crisis. Preventing and ending youth homelessness means providing targeted programs with few to no programmatic prerequisites for permanent housing, with low barrier admission policies, rapid and streamlined entry into housing, supportive services that are persistently used to engage tenants to ensure housing stability, with all tenants having full rights and legal protections, especially transgender and gender non-conforming people. Most importantly, it means elevating the voices, experiences, and expertise of youth who have experienced homelessness and including them in all aspects of the planning and implementation process of programs and initiatives designed to prevent and end youth homelessness. Congress has laid the groundwork on this and should continue its support of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program which brings together Continuums of Care and youth who have formerly experienced homelessness to provide technical assistance and capacity building towards implementing local plans to prevent and end youth homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.