

---

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING**  
**Senator Scott Wiener, Chair**  
**2023 - 2024 Regular**

---

**Bill No:** AB 589 **Hearing Date:** 6/20/2023  
**Author:** Boerner  
**Version:** 5/18/2023  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Aiyana Cortez

**SUBJECT:** Homeless youth: transitional housing

**DIGEST:** This bill requires, upon appropriation by the Legislature, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to establish the Unicorn Homes Transitional Housing for Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth Program (the program) as a three-year pilot program.

**ANALYSIS:**

*Existing law:*

- 1) Establishes the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal-ICH), formerly known as the Homelessness Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC), to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Housing First guidelines and regulations in California and identify resources and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California.
- 2) Defines the core components of Housing First to include tenant screening and selection practices that promote accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, completion of treatment, or participation in services, and offers services that are informed by a harm-reduction philosophy, where tenants are engaged in nonjudgmental communication regarding drug and alcohol use, and where tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices, as well as connected to evidence-based treatment if the tenant so chooses.
- 3) Establishes homeless youth emergency service pilot projects in the City of Los Angeles, and the City and County of San Francisco in order to provide services to homeless minors.

- 4) Establishes HCD under the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency (BCSH) to, among other responsibilities, administer programs that assist in creating housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- 5) Establishes several programs administered by HCD and Cal-ICH targeted at supporting transition-aged youth (TAY) who may be housing insecure or at-risk of homelessness, or experiencing homelessness including THP-Plus Housing Program (THP-Plus), Housing Navigators Program (HNP), and Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAP).
- 6) Requires homeless youth projects to provide services that include, but are not limited to, food and access to an overnight shelter, counseling to address immediate emotional crises or problems, and linkage to other services offered by public and private agencies, among others.
- 7) Defines in federal law homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children, as specified, who qualify as homeless because the children are living in certain circumstances.
- 8) Establishes the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to coordinate a federal response to homelessness and create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to end homelessness.

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires HCD to establish the program as a three-year pilot administered by community-based organizations (CBOs) providing a majority of their services to the LGBTQ+ community in the Counties of San Diego and Sacramento upon appropriation by the Legislature.
- 2) The program must meet all of the following requirements:
  - a) Fund the CBOs providing emergency transitional housing for LGBTQ+ youth between 18 and 24 years of age who are experiencing homelessness due to family rejection, with the ultimate goal of the program being reunification with the youth's family when possible.

- b) Place eligible youths with volunteer host families. Any individual in the host family who is 18 years of age or older and with whom the youth would be living shall meet specified criteria, pursuant to the results of a background check conducted via Live Scan.
  - c) Place eligible youths with families who are able to provide crisis intervention with a trauma-informed approach to their care.
  - d) Comply with the core components of Housing First.
- 3) Defines “trauma-informed approach” to include all of the following:
- a) Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of the youth by understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of trauma.
  - b) Preventing re-traumatization to ensure that the youths feel physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe in their placement with a host family.
  - c) Demonstrating trustworthiness and transparency when making decisions with the aim to build and maintain trust between the host family and the youth placed in their care.
  - d) Leveling power differences for shared decision-making by ensuring that those impacted by decisions have a voice in the decision-making process.
  - e) Empowering youths to build on their strengths and identify strategies that will help them heal from trauma.
- 4) Requires the CBOs that receive funding for this pilot program to prepare an annual report to HCD with the final report due on or before June 30, 2026. The annual reports must contain the following information:
- a) The number of times the CBO was contacted by an LGBTQ+ youth potentially eligible for the program created by this chapter.
  - b) How many of those initial contacts became participants in the program.
  - c) How many of those initial contacts became repeat contacts.
  - d) How many of those initial contacts were referred to other resources and services.
  - e) How many of those initial contacts left the program for permanent housing.
- 5) Requires HCD to compile the annual reports into a final report to be submitted to the Legislature on or before December 31, 2026.
- 6) Establishes a sunset date of January 1, 2027 for the program.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Author's statement.* “Stable and affirming housing plays an important role in the safety of all youth, especially youth identifying as LGBTQ+ who may not feel supported in their self-identity. AB 589 creates the Unicorn Homes Transitional Housing for Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth Program pilot project in the Counties of San Diego and Sacramento that would help identify, screen, and train LGBTQ+ affirming households who are willing to host LGBTQ+ identifying youth who are experiencing homelessness due to family rejection with a safe place to stay. The bill promotes housing stability and a positive support system that helps transition LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness to permanent housing either as independent adults, or by reuniting with their family.”
- 2) *LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.* The 2022 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported, on a single night in 2022, there were 9,590 unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 experiencing homelessness in California. This is the largest number of unaccompanied youth in any state and accounts for more than a third of all unaccompanied youth nationally. California also accounted for 52% (6,752 youth) of all unsheltered unaccompanied youth.

LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness reported higher rates of mental health challenges, compared to their stably housed LGBTQ+ peers, according to a recent study conducted by the Trevor Project. The study also found that, overall, 28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives, and LGBTQ+ youth who reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability had higher rates of victimization, being in foster care, and food insecurity, compared to their stably housed LGBTQ+ peers. Additionally, the study found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth experiencing homelessness report higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts than their straight, cisgender peers experiencing homelessness.

- 3) *Housing First.* Cal-ICH was established in 2017 through the enactment of SB 1380 (Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016) as a way to coordinate the state's response to homelessness and to oversee the implementation of “Housing First” policies, guidelines, and regulations to reduce the prevalence and duration of homelessness in California. Additionally, Cal-ICH, through SB 918 (Wiener), Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018, established the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to better serve the state's homeless youth population and required

Cal-ICH to take on additional related responsibilities focused on addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

“Housing First” means the evidence-based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed and requested on a voluntary basis and that do not make housing contingent on participation in services. Programs offering time-limited, supportive services serving homeless youth under the age of 25 are encouraged to use a positive youth development model that is culturally competent to work with the youth to engage in family reunification efforts, where appropriate and when in the best interest of the youth. This bill would require the pilot program to comply with the core components of Housing First.

- 4) *Existing programs for TAY.* The state offers several programs targeted specifically at youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who may be housing insecure or at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.

**THP-Plus Housing Program (THP-Plus):** California provides transitional housing, up to 24 months, to former foster youth who age out of the system through THP-Plus and specialized federal Housing Choice Vouchers. THP-Plus provides transitional housing for former foster youth who exited foster care (including those supervised by probation) between the ages of 18 and 24. THP-Plus programs are certified by the county social services agency. Youth can live in apartments, single-family dwellings, condominiums, college dormitories, and host family models (living with people you know).

**Housing Navigators Program (HNP):** The 2019-20 budget appropriated \$5 million to HCD to create HNP to provide grants to counties to support housing navigators to help youth up to 25 years of age and including former foster youth secure and maintain housing, with priority given to young adults in the foster care system. HNP funds housing navigators for county child welfare agencies. The role of a housing navigator is to act as a housing specialist to assist young adults with their pursuits of locating available housing.

**Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAP):** Provides funding to big cities, counties, and Continuums of Care to address the immediate unsheltered homelessness population. The Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and subsequently HHAP requires applicants to use a percent of their allocation to assist homeless youth. A total of \$276 million from both programs is required to be used by local jurisdictions to address youth homelessness. The John Burton Foundation analyzed the impact these

funds had regionally on the reducing the number of homelessness youth by comparing the 2020 PIT count to the 2022 PIT count. They found a 21% reduction in homelessness among unaccompanied youth. California's decrease in youth homelessness is 2.6 times greater than the reduction in all other states – all other states decreased by 8%.

- 5) *Unicorn Homes*. According to the author, existing programs are failing to meet the specific needs of unhoused LGBTQ+ youth. Currently, the North County LGBTQ resource center operates the Unicorn Homes program, which aims to provide housing stability to youth with the ultimate goal of reuniting youth with families and, where possible, addressing the underlying problems that led to separation in the first place. Unicorn Homes also connects youth with mental health resources, and provides job readiness services, life coaching, and independent living skills.

This bill requires HCD to establish a three-year pilot program similar to the existing Unicorn Homes project in San Diego. The bill requires the program to be administered by a local CBO in the counties of San Diego and Sacramento. Funds would be used to place youth with host families who would be required to provide crisis intervention with a trauma-informed approach, as defined, to their care of the youth living with them.

- 6) *Double-referral*. This bill was double-referred to the Senate Human Services Committee.

#### **RELATED LEGISLATION:**

**AB 2663 (Ramos, 2022)** — would have required the California Department of Social Services to establish a five-year pilot program to increase permanency outcomes for LGBTQ+ and gender-expansive youth and their families. *This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom due to costs.*

**AB 592 (Friedman, Chapter 702, Statutes of 2021)** — expanded the housing options for extended foster youth, particularly as it related to LGBTQ youth.

**AB 1979 (Friedman, Chapter 141, Statutes of 2020)** — expanded the definition of a Supervised Independent Living Setting to include a transitional livings setting approved by the county to support youth entering or reentering care or transitioning between placements, and required counties to examine their ability to meet the emergency housing needs of nonminor dependents (NMDs).

**AB 531 (Friedman, 2019)** — would have permitted certain approved caregivers of NMDs to convert to a host family without additional certification, would have required counties to examine their ability to meet the emergency housing needs of NMDs, and would have allowed counties to request funds for the purpose of providing housing navigation services to youth. *This bill was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**SB 918 (Wiener, Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018)** — established the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to better serve the state’s homeless youth population and required HCFC to take on additional related responsibilities, including setting goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in the state, defining outcome measures, and gathering data related to those goals.

**SB 1380 (Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016)** — created the HCFC to coordinate the state’s response to homelessness.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No    Fiscal Com.: Yes    Local: No

**POSITIONS:** (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 14, 2023.)

**SUPPORT:**

- City of Oceanside
- City of San Diego
- Equality California
- North County LGBTQ Resource Center
- Point Source Youth
- Sacramento LGBT Community Center
- San Diego LGBT Community Center

**OPPOSITION:**

None received.

**-- END --**