

Transcript of Claims, Red Flags and What to Do About Them

Lynda Becker: Good morning everyone. My name is Lynda Becker and I'm a Youth Development Coordinator with Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program at the Center for Schools and Communities. I will be your moderator for this session. We do have two co-presenters with us today. Shane Burroughs is the Region Eight Coordinator located at the Bucks County Intermediate Unit and Tina Onassis is the Homeless Liaison and Residency Verification and Truancy Officer for Chichester School District in southeastern PA. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Claims, Red Flags and What To Do About Them webinar, and it's now my pleasure to welcome Shane Burroughs and I will turn the microphone over to him now.

Shane B.: Okay, I want to cover a little bit of McKinney-Vento information. Really, at the very heart of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the fact that the students need educational stability. Most of the time, these are students who are lacking stability in their everyday lives with their housing. The very least that these students can have is a place where they can have stability. Educational stability is key for these students and it's our job and our honor to provide that to those students.

The homeless liaison role is, as I'm sure, the homeless liaisons who are on this webinar can attest to the fact that the responsibilities and the duties have increased over the last year. That is, of course, for the benefit of the students who are experiencing homelessness. It's important to make sure that the person who is the homeless liaison in your LEA is equipped and capable of providing the time necessary to meet the needs of those students and to provide the rights and services and supports that McKinney-Vento expects and mandates. The law requires liaisons to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination with other entities and agencies.

This is, the federal guidance has really increased their efforts in this realm because they want to make sure that we're capturing, not only the students who are in our schools, but we're also identifying students who are perhaps not attending school. Maybe they're in a shelter or another agency is connected with those students and so outreach to these entities, these agencies is very important for identification and making sure that the staff in those locations understand at least the basics of the McKinney-Vento Act and what they should also be looking for in terms of who is potentially McKinney-Vento eligible.

Outreach also includes within the school district, making sure that school district personnel, staff, and faculty are well-trained and prepared to provide the services. Moving on to the next slide, I got side-tracked, I apologize.

Lynda Becker: Shane, I'm sorry. Can we go back, and I forgot to do the first poll to see how experienced our participants are in terms of being liaisons or working with the program, so if I can interrupt you for a minute?

Shane B.: That's a great idea.

Lynda Becker: Everyone, if you could please take a look at the poll question number one. You can click whether or not you are the district or LEA homeless liaison. Either yes or no. We'll give you a few moments to do that. It looks like some people are still responding. It looks like about two-thirds of you are not the homeless liaison and about a third of you are. Yeah, about 65% are not the homeless liaison and 35% are. Then, a follow-up to that is if you are the homeless liaison, how many years have you served in this role? Please check if you are the liaison, whether it's less than one year, one to two years, three to five years, or if you've been doing this work for more than five years.

It's interesting, the numbers are coming in and it looks as though about a third of you have been the liaison for less than one year so this should be a very useful webinar for you. About 12% have been doing this from one to two years and 20% three to five and about 27% for more than five years. More numbers came in, it's very interesting that over 40% of you have been the liaison for your school district for less than one year. All right, thank you all very much. Shane, you can go ahead then with the next slide.

Shane B.: Okay, so I'm going to touch on eligibility a little bit more in just a moment, but I did want to cover some of these other rights that students and parents are entitled to under the McKinney-Vento Act. We'll talk about eligibility in just a moment, but immediate enrollment, that includes fully participating in school and school related activities. That, by immediate, that really does mean immediate. There are times where a student is identified as McKinney-Vento eligible and that student should be able to participate in class and school activities. Sometimes even that day, but certainly by the very next day, it should be worked out so that that student is sitting in a classroom and fully participating in school activities.

As far as the school of origin is concerned, again, this is at the heart of McKinney-Vento, students have the right to remain in their school of origin if they meet the requirements for McKinney-Vento. They also have the right to attend the school district where they're temporarily residing. Transportation, I'd like to point out here that of course, the district is responsible to provide transportation to and from school and school activities, but there's also some changes to the law have made it so that now, transportation needs to be provided, even to the end of the school year, even if a student becomes permanently housed in that school year, they still need to be provided transportation to the end of the year to ensure educational stability.

Free meals, that includes breakfast, if your school district or LEA provides breakfast. That certainly includes lunch. That is without the normally required paperwork that families would typically have to fill out. It should be an automatic

thing. Free meals should begin right away. Free and appropriate public education, of course, we expect that, and dispute. The families do and the students, they do have the right to appeal an LEA determination. Sometimes an LEA will say that student is being disenrolled or denied enrollment and we want to make sure that all families and students who are receiving those letters are aware that they have the right to dispute the determination of the district. They need to be provided in the disenrollment or denial of enrollment letter the form that is used by the state to submit that dispute. That would then go to the state coordinator and the state and the regional coordinators would work together to make a determination within 30 business days.

The purpose of identification, proper identification of families, students experiencing homelessness is important so that the LEA can provide support and offer appropriate services to the family, child, and/or youth. This again, this is why we are trying to identify. The federal guidance has said that districts and LEAs, they need to be working towards identification of these students instead of simply waiting for the students to come to them or the families to come to them and say that they believe their situation is homeless and meets the requirements for McKinney-Vento. Certainly, they don't often come forward and say that so the district needs to be working as a team to identify these students, whether they're in schools or in local shelters, so that they can be provided the supports and services that they're entitled to.

This includes, of course, what we talked about above, as well as things like school supplies, school clothing, and any field trips that have an academic value, things like that. We want to make sure that the students are fully experiencing, having a full educational experience. When making determinations, we want to talk just briefly about eligibility and services. I know Tina is going to address some of these as well, but each student has a unique housing situation. That is the homeless liaisons on this webinar. I know I'm preaching to the choir because they understand how unique some of these cases can be. Something that may seem like it's very clear-cut, very cut and dry. Sometimes you find out just a little bit more information and you realize that this is not like the previous cases that you've dealt with. Every case needs to be handled individually.

You're really focusing, when you're trying to make these determinations, you're focusing on these three things. You want to find out if it's fixed, if it's regular, and if it's adequate, their nighttime residence. If even one of those things is missing, if it's not fixed, but maybe it is regular and adequate, then it's still homeless. All it takes is one of those things to be missing. There are times when the combination of those things that are in play.

Three simple steps when you're trying to make determinations. Again, Tina is going to be covering this when she begins, but gathering all the relevant information. You don't want to simply, again, it's case-by-case and they're unique situations, so you don't want to approach a case as though it's just like any other. Gathering the relevant information, it includes ... Well, I'm actually just going to let Tina talk about that, but number two, analyzing what you know, once you've

acquired that information and you are looking at the law and how that information is case details relate to the McKinney-Vento Act, then you can make a determination unless the LEA is not fully comfortable and confident in their determination, in which case, it's perfectly fine to reach out to your regional coordinator or your site coordinator.

There are times where even the regional or site coordinator that you work with may have to consult with the state coordinator in order to ensure that the correct determination is being made. I also like to make it very clear that the role of the regional coordinator and the site coordinator or the state coordinator is simply to provide guidance. We represent the McKinney-Vento Act and we want to make sure that school districts and LEAs are feeling well-supported and that they understand the law and how it applies to each individual case.

Determining eligibility. As we mentioned, it's a case-by-case determination. All situations are different, but the key with this slide is that you want to get as much information as possible without intimidating a parent or youth. Oftentimes, they've told their story so many times, just repeatedly to different entities. Sometimes shelters and case managers. Sometimes shelter and youth agency, case workers. It's important that we not retraumatize them as we go through the process of collecting and gathering the information needed to make an accurate determination.

Handling the families and the youth gently because they have already been through an awful lot most of the time. We want to make sure that we're being sensitive to what they've been through and where they're currently at. They do understand that sometimes, there's feelings of powerlessness with the situations they're in and we want to be sensitive to the fact that some things are out of their control and letting them know. Building those relationships and letting them know that we are there for them and help, surround them with as much support and service as possible.

We already talked about fixed, regular, and adequate. That is what you're looking for when you're trying to make a determination. Tina is going to elaborate in her part of the presentation as to what that looks like and so I am not going to cover that any longer. I'm going to turn it back over to Lynda.

Lynda Becker:

Thank you so much, Shane, and I apologize to everyone because I forgot to do the first couple of slides as introduction. One thing that I do want to say is that the preliminary figures for the 2015-16 school year show that there are over 27,000 children experiencing homelessness or students experiencing homelessness that were identified during that school year. That number is up significantly from the year before. We know that there are challenges to identification. Students and families may hide their homelessness due to embarrassment or fear. There might be some families or parents who may be very fearful of losing custody of their children. We know that sometimes there may need to be a referral to the children and youth agency, but folks need to know that it does not mean that you were referred to children and youth just because of a homeless situation.

Specifically, unaccompanied homeless youth may hide their homelessness due to fear of being returned to an unsafe family environment or being taken into custody by the child welfare system. We know, especially with the unaccompanied homeless youth, that they may never share all of the details regarding their situation and it's not really up to us to try to figure that out or to make a statement or a determination that they should go home because there is most likely a very good reason why they are not at home at this point. They may have been thrown out or chosen to leave, either way.

Shane, I think you still have control of the slides, if you could go to the next slide for me. Invisible children and youth may be those who are not enrolled in school and they may be living in doubled-up situations, couch surfing, they may be on the street, or in a hotel/motel, in a car, or in a tent. I'm sure that many of you have run into those situations. Actually, doubled-up, the doubled-up population is the largest population here in Pennsylvania, as well as across the nation.

Another challenge to identification is that families and unaccompanied youth may not be aware that they qualify for McKinney-Vento services, and that's why it's important for us to get the information out there and have it publicly visible so that people know that they should come to you if they are in a homeless situation. Another challenge is that school personnel may misunderstand the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and not recognize potential signs that a student has lost housing. That's why our regional staff here in Pennsylvania and we are unique across the nation. There aren't many that have a regional approach that make sure that all the LEAs and all of the providers can get connected to the program, but we do always try to focus on training so that everyone is aware of what the rights and responsibilities are. I'll go ahead and turn it back to Shane.

Shane B.:

Protecting families' and students' privacy, I know that Tina is going to address this a little bit so I won't spend a lot of time on that either, but not contacting people or agencies outside of the school system to obtain information about the student's living situation, that would violate the family's or youth's privacy and dignity, as well as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, so FERPA, specifically speaking with landlords of where a family is currently residing, and I know Tina is going to elaborate a little bit more on that.

What if the family experiencing homelessness refuses services? I just got a phone call yesterday about this scenario. It should be noted that it's important to, if they do meet the requirements for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, it's important to still include them in the data, the online data that LEAs are required to submit. However, they have the right, certainly, to refuse services. If you're maintaining a strong relationship with the family and the student, then it's very likely that when they do have needs, that they will come back and actually seek out those supports and services, but they certainly have the right to refuse service, but please do remember to include them in your data.

At this point, I'm going to turn the microphone over to Tina Onassis. She is a homeless liaison here in Region Eight with Chichester School District. I have to

add, not sliding any of my other regional coordinators, the homeless liaisons, rather, here in Region Eight, but Tina is definitely one of the best. I refer many people to her, especially when a homeless liaison is trying to learn a little bit more about how to investigate particular cases, specific cases. Tina is a valuable resource. At the end, I know that she plans to let you know that you can reach out to her in the future, but with that being said, Tina Onassis.

Tina Onassis:

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Shane, thank you Lynda, and thank you Michael, our technical guy. In our capacity as liaisons for students experiencing homelessness, we're the district's fact finders. Our ultimate goal as McKinney-Vento eligibility investigators is to gather facts, gain a better understanding of the family situation, and based upon our fact-finding, make a determination concerning the children's eligibility under McKinney-Vento. Thereby, ensuring that the children's educational rights are protected and their placement is appropriate in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act.

The aim of a fact finder is not to conduct a witch hunt. The end result that the fact finder seeks is not to be utilized in any punitive way. The process for finding facts is the same for a new case, as it is for a follow-up case, or a case that causes you to stop in your tracks and say, "What?" It's just of varying degrees. Let's get to the do-nots and get them out of the way because they're pretty cut and dry. Do not require the family to produce documentation of any kind. You may certainly ask for it, and it's nice to have it because it makes our jobs a bit easier, but lack of paperwork has no bearing on making a determination. This is why it is important to take your role as fact finder very seriously.

Do not contact landlords for the residence where the family is currently, temporarily housed. You don't want to create a double homeless situation by getting the lease holder and the subject family thrown out. Do not divulge information about the family or their situation to any third party who is not on your need-to-know list and without first obtaining the consent of the family. During my conversation with the family, I very delicately ask if it would be okay to share information with the school district social worker so she can reach out to the family with additional support. I've never had a family say no when I've approached the subject in that manner.

Now, to what we can do. Particularly, when you have a case that makes your hair stand up on the back of your neck and causes you to scrunch your face up, a tried and true formula for fact gathering is to obtain the who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes, you need to know the how. Where the causal event, for example is an eviction, and we'll probably stick with that through the remainder of the presentation, I ask if there is an eviction notice, but very delicately, again. I don't require that ... I don't require it in order to continue my fact finding, nor should any of you. I inform them that it is not required.

Then, what do I do? I pull up the magisterial district's website for my county by going to the website listed on the slide and I run a search. I run a participant name search and use the category Landlord/Tenant from the drop down menu.

For our purposes today, the family did have a landlord/tenant dispute. I then click on the case and scroll down to the judgment section where it will tell me in black and white whether or not the judge has granted possession of the property to the landlord. I print it out and keep it in my file for that particular family.

Another way to verify civil proceedings is to check to see if your county seat has an online public access website. If they do, you can easily check civil public records through that site as a means to corroborate information you've uncovered. You will find these tools effective in proving and disproving information you've been provided with. Everything on this site is public information. A strong word of caution, and I know I mentioned it before, but it does bear repeating. You are a fact finder, not a snoop. You are not there to dig up dirt on people, you are there to gain a better understanding of your case to corroborate facts, sometimes to disprove facts, in order to make a determination that is in the best possible interest of the students.

During your search on county websites, you can uncover and run property ownership searches, deed searches, criminal conviction searches, and there's a list of other useful public information sites. We can discuss those one-on-one if you ever have a question after this presentation, but website searches are not the end-all-be-all. The information derived from these sites is sometimes stale. In my opinion, if I don't see it, then it didn't happen. I always drive to sites of reported homelessness. I get out of my car, I do a walk around, I get a lay of the land, sort of speak. If the front window has no blinds or coverings and you can clearly see it as vacant, that part of the story is corroborated.

Know your district and the days the trash is being picked up. Try to go out after the mail has been delivered or the day the trash is being put out for pick up. I take pictures as often as possible, either to document that the residence is vacant or that it is occupied or in a stage somewhere in between. For my standard of documentation, a drive-by does not provide the substance that a stop and lock does. Drive-bys just don't cut it. Get out of the car, and if you look at the picture, close the door, walk around, take pictures and notes. If the neighborhood gossip pays you a visit, listen and take notes, whether they're mental or otherwise, but I will tell you this. If you start writing things down, a lot of times people stop talking, so learn how to take mental notes. Then, when you jump back into your car, write them down. Then, follow up on any leads that may develop.

When you're doing these on-site visitations, you might want to leave your business card with the date and time that you visited. Put a note on the card requesting a call. Just a super simple, please call me, thank you, and leave it in the door. No mention of names or why you're there. When a residence is vacant, I usually get a call from the landlord because they're the first person to go to that address after someone has left. They survey it and then they send their people in to clean it up and what not. Landlords are a plethora of information. You're not soliciting from them, they're calling you, so it's okay. All you do is basically say,

“Can you tell me where these people are? Do you happen to know? I'm with the school district and I have some information to offer them.”

I found that the conversation usually goes one of two ways. Like, “Yeah, this is Steve Wolf. You left a card at my property. There's no one at that property now but the tenants before that were here and they had kids,” but I would typically follow it up and say, “You know, well, how did they depart your property?” The landlord will usually say they either left of their own accord, like the lease ran out and they didn't want to renew, or they were evicted. Often, the landlord will volunteer other information, such as they got a new place. This is a prime opportunity to ask if the landlord has the address. He should because that's where the security deposit is going to be sent, or he'll say something like, “The husband lost his job, so they moved in with family until they get back on their feet.”

Don't discount anything that anybody tells you because you never know that a little seed could turn into a big plant, so you want to follow up on that. There's also always a neighbor who wants to share information with anyone who'll listen. I never solicit them, they come to me like a moth to a flame. I don't share any information with the individual. I always wear my school badge, and if asked, I simply say, “I am with the school district,” and flash my ID badge. That's usually enough to get them going, and then I'm merely listening and take mental notes.

You want to get out to the locations where families are currently finding themselves temporarily. My county has a homeless coalition that I'm proud to be a part of. Through this coalition, I'm able to get my hands on literature such as a homeless survival guide. That typically will list food pantries, mental health facilities, shelters, et cetera. It's a pamphlet on how to ... I also give them a pamphlet on how to conduct oneself on an interview and other such literature. I do that because, as Shane and as Lynda have mentioned, homeless families feel powerless at times. They feel guilty. They are just beside themselves, but if you give them something that they can hold on to, they feel empowered. That goes so far in helping their psyche heal and in being able to deal with their children and deal with the situation in a less stressful way.

When you go out to a home, you want to take a folder with you that contains a list of food pantries in the area and other available sources of assistance. You want to speak directly to them, but in a non-adversarial tone. You want to ask to see where everyone is sleeping. Again, under McKinney-Vento, you have the right to see where they are. You have a right to go in, you have a right to view, you have a right to ask questions, just do it in a non-adversarial tone, and be there as a support. I just want to talk quickly about organization when you're conducting these investigations, because you do get so much information that if you don't keep it organized, you're going to lose something that could potentially blow your case wide open.

To assist with maintaining organization and clarity in an investigation, I keep a kit in my car. The car contains file folders, blank case notes, county and metro map

in case your GPS goes haywire, a camera, and in this case, it's a throw away camera and I use it when I, let's say, for example, I run out of storage on my phone, because I usually take pictures on my phone. I keep business cards, pens, a clipboard, and a blank notepad. I keep plastic bags, rubber bands, and bed bug and tick repellent, and a change of clothes in a duffle bag in my car. Don't forget to replenish your kits after a day on the road. That way, you'll never find yourself without the basic tools you need to do your job properly and thoroughly.

Okay, enough about that. What happens when you encounter a family that is being evasive? If a parent pushes back, that's a red flag. If a parent won't let you in, that's often a red flag. If you arrive at your designated meeting time and no one is home and you don't get a phone call from the parent, that's a red flag. What do you do? Don't leave, call the family from your car, try to get in. If that's impossible, you'll want to send an outreach letter that sets a deadline for contact, and make it a short deadline. I would say within a week and no more than that. If you get no response to that request, send another letter certified in first class mail informing the parent of the potential for disenrollment.

If you have no contact or you have a finding of fact that leads you to determine that the family is not homeless, you want to provide your regional coordinator with the chronology for your work to ensure that you've done everything you could possibly do. You want to proceed with your district's process for disenrollment. In the disenrollment letter, be sure that there is wording that includes information about appealing the determination to your school board, because that's the first step. Then, second, include information on how and where to appeal at the regional or Pennsylvania Department of Education level and/or Pennsylvania Department of Education level.

I have volumes of letters to suit nearly every need, so please don't reinvent the wheel. Everything already exists, literally. If you're stumped about what your next investigative move should be, know that you aren't alone. We all hit brick walls. Contact me and I'll show whatever I have and whatever I know with all of you. My contact information is here, please keep it handy. I can't help you make a determination, but I can certainly help guide you in any investigation and any investigative brick wall that you might hit. Again, I can offer you a plethora of letters to suit practically every need. If one doesn't exist, I can help you wordsmith one. I thank you all for listening.

Shane B.: Thanks, Tina.

Tina Onassis: You're welcome.

Lynda Becker: Thank you, Tina. One thing we didn't mention is that Tina does have a background as a private investigator, so you can see that it really helps her in her role as the truancy and residency verification person at Chichester School District, as well as the homeless liaison. Just a reminder to everyone that you certainly should be in contact with Tina if you have questions about how to better

investigate, but in terms of eligibility, questions or issues, you really need to do that through your regional staff. I do want to point out to everyone that Tina did share, if you see in your handouts, the handouts box, on the webinar, there are some of the sample letters and information that Tina was talking about. Again, she's willing to share information with all of you.

Before we move on to, we're going to do a couple more poll questions, but we did have some questions that have come through. Thank you to those of you who have sent questions in the questions box and I encourage any of you, if you have questions, to go ahead and do that, but we'll go through this. Shane, I think this first one is for you and it's from Jelena, I'm not sure if I'm saying that correctly. I apologize if not, but the question is ... Pardon me. What is the difference between regular and fixed residence?

Shane B.: Thank you, that's a great question. Tina, feel free to jump in here on this as well. I did want to point out before answering the question that Tina has been a homeless liaison with Chichester School District for 13 years. She's definitely not new to all of this. She's seen the McKinney-Vento Act change over time, and hopefully we believe for the better, in most cases, if not all cases. The difference between fixed and regular, regular would mean that they're staying in the same place consistently. They're perhaps staying doubled up or in a motel or ... I'm sorry. They're staying in a home consistently every night, they're not moving, bouncing between different places at all. How would you define fixed? Tina, fixed and regular, so regular. She's drawing a blank too. Sorry.

Tina Onassis: Regular would mean like, let's say, for example, not something on wheels.

Shane B.: Right, right, right.

Tina Onassis: Not in a camper, for example.

Shane B.: Right, tents and ...

Tina Onassis: Tents.

Shane B.: Yeah, so, yeah. Adequate, that is simply, and I know that wasn't asked, but I did want to point out, in addition to what Tina was saying, when you go into a home and you're looking as far as adequacy, I wanted to point out that if students or individuals in the home are sleeping on air mattresses or on a couch or something like that, or they're living out of suitcases and they don't have things in dressers and maybe there's overcrowding in the home, there's too many people for the number of bedrooms in the home, that alone, you could have other situations where certain key utilities are not working, running water, heat during the winter time and electricity, things like that could point to the fact that that's really not an adequate situation, but hopefully that answered the question at least a little bit. I think there's definitely more to be said on that, but fixed and regular would be that they're in one location and they're there consistently.

Lynda Becker: Thank you, Shane and Tina. Just a reminder for everyone, if you have questions about fixed, regular, and adequate in terms of a certain situation with a family or with a student, perhaps an unaccompanied youth, then you can certainly check with your regional or site coordinator. We do have another question, and this one is from Tammy. She is asking, "What if the family refuses to answer our questions when trying to make a determination?"

Shane B.: Okay. Well, Tina is definitely going to jump in on this one. I see her head bobbing up and down, but I would like to start off by saying that when you run into a situation where a family or a student, usually it's a parent or guardian that they're unwilling to provide any information to the district, it's important to point out to the family that this is part of what is required of the district. The district is required to investigate situation claims of homelessness and they're not overstepping their bounds. Certainly, they have a right to not share that information, however, it's going to prevent a determination from being able to be made. If they're refusing to provide information and you don't have enough detail to go off of to make an accurate determination, a determination of McKinney-Vento eligibility cannot be made. The family does need to cooperate in order for that determination of McKinney-Vento eligibility to be made.

Tina Onassis: I actually have a case like that right now. I've sent a delicate outreach letter to the family, it's one of the handouts. I sent it home with the student in their backpack in a sealed envelope. I assured them that I was not prying, but that I'm nearly am trying to do the right thing by them and by their child. I wanted to talk to them and they still haven't responded. I've tried to have a meeting set up at the school and they've avoided that. I put my investigator hat on and now I'm on the trail and I'm trying to find them. Not coming home very well, but I'm hoping that shortly something will pop and hopefully get the parent on board.

I have one more resource to follow-up with, and that is a final letter that I'm going to send home with the child basically stating, "Look, if you don't contact me, I can't make a determination, and if I can't make a determination, I have to say you're not at this address, so you're no longer residing in the district, and there's no other information available to make a determination any which way, so we're going to have to move towards putting the child through the disenrollment process." Then, I say, "Please get back to me," before a certain date. It's a very quick date, usually a week, before the disenrollment process begins.

Shane B.: Thank you for that. I think it's important to note that sometimes, that's all it takes to get a family to start to share the information that you need in order to make those determinations. Hopefully that answers the question. Tina, a little bit more.

Tina Onassis: Yeah. I'm sorry. I believe also, another one of my letter handouts addresses the fact that the parent had not made contact or that there was no follow through, but if it's not there, call me and I'll send one to you via e-mail. No problem.

Shane B.: Thank you.

Tina Onassis: You're welcome.

Lynda Becker: We will. Thank you, Shane and Tina. We will have all of the handouts and if there are additional ones, Tina, you want to give to me after the webinar is over, we can make sure that when we send out the recording that they're attached as well or that they're available as a resource. We know that the job as a homeless liaison or really as any school personnel or even a provider in working with families or individuals, students who are experiencing homelessness is very difficult. It's especially difficult knowing that at times, there aren't appropriate resources for folks, and that happens more often in the rural areas of the state because there's a lack of resources typically, but of course, it's our job to try to get them connected in the best way that we can and we can't really help them unless we can properly identify them, which is why what we're talking about today is so important.

There is from Paul, I'm not sure, I think this is a recommendation for there's a magisterial website that perhaps is another resource. I'm not sure why that is there, unless it's one that was on one of Tina's slides. I didn't go back and check that, but thank you Paul, that's an additional resource. There is one more question. Again, I encourage everyone, if you have questions, put them in the questions panel because we do still have time. From Dalia, the question is, "How can classroom teachers support the liaison?" To start, before I turn it over to Shane and Tina, is just to say that with the teachers and other people that are in direct contact with students throughout the day, oftentimes it might be those individuals who might have an inkling or might actually know or the student might tell them of their situation. Oftentimes, it might be a teacher who would know first that a student is experiencing homelessness or might find out from a family that they're in a difficult situation. All right, Tina, Shane, I'll turn it over to you now.

Shane B.: Okay, we both have a comment to this. First of all, I'd like to start by saying that I love to see the districts and the LEAs where the faculty, the staff, are all involved in the identification process and the support process. Homeless liaison should be working with other personnel in their building for the sake of identification, but also support. A lot of times, students sitting in a classroom will be struggling in ways that they never did before. Sometimes, it's an indicator of homelessness, or potential homelessness, and then it can be brought to the attention of the homeless liaison to investigate it and make a determination, but also, to be understanding in the classroom, teachers need to understand that the challenges they're facing, these students are facing outside of the classroom, in their everyday lives outside of school, it's challenging. They may not be getting a lot of sleep, they may not have access to the internet, to printers, to get homework assignments done, to even a computer.

It's important for teachers sometimes to be brought into this, not all the time, only when necessary to support a student, but I think that it's valuable for teachers to understand some basics of the situation so that they can be understanding when it comes to homework assignments and changes in academic performance, as well as behavior issues.

Tina Onassis: I'm really fortunate, in my district, they are a great group of people, as I'm sure you all have in your district. They just want to help, but sometimes, their help can extend a little too far. I had developed a flowchart and a process on how to handle claims or children that they suspect that may be experiencing homelessness. Often, a teacher will find out some information and she'll share it with the guidance counselor. The guidance counselor will typically call the student in because they have experience in dealing with children that are struggling and will extract some information. They'll in turn provide me with a request for investigation form where they put down the information that they've received. That helps me open a file and keep everything organized.

The guidance counselor will typically reach out and say "Hey look, you know, I think that your situation may need to be handled a little differently and we have someone in our district that does that and she's wonderful and she's this and she's that and we work together as a team. Would it be alright for her to call you?" The parents never say no. Then, when I'm speaking to the parents, I gather all the information and I will often ask them if it's okay to share the information with the school district social worker because they have other resources that I don't have. We work together as a huge team. It all works out, but everybody needs to know their place and their role in the process. We can't have parents be bombarded with three people asking them the same question over and over again. It'll put them off and it's not productive.

Lynda Becker: Okay, thank you very much. Our next question has to do with charter schools. This is for Pamela. I just want to preface my comments before Tina and Shane can chime in to say that, there are of course, many, many charter schools in Pennsylvania, both brick and mortar, as well as cyber charters, and of course, cyber charters are even more confusing when it comes to McKinney-Vento, but just know that any charter school is considered an LEA, even if it's a cyber charter. Therefore, they need to also identify a liaison. That liaison is responsible for making sure the McKinney-Vento is implemented properly for that charter school. Again, your regional staff will be able to help you with those situations. Tina and Shane, I'm going to pass it back to you.

Shane B.: I'm sorry, what is the exact question?

Lynda Becker: Sorry about that. She said, "How does that work for charter school? You are not required to live in the district." I'm assuming it may be a question about ...

Tina Onassis: Is it dealing with cyber?

Lynda Becker: ... cybers, perhaps.

Tina Onassis: Sounds like more of a billing question, which district is billed for it. If they're determined to not be homeless, then you would notify the charter school and then they would make the adjustment in their computer to send the bill to whatever district the child is living in. If they are homeless, then they stay with you and the bills come to you.

- Shane B.: Right, charter schools are, I mean, all charter schools are required to have a homeless liaison and the same would apply. Investigations into situations of when trying to determine eligibility. It's all really the same regardless of what district the student may be coming from.
- Lynda Becker: Okay, I got further information. I hate to interrupt, but I got further information. Apparently, Pamela was asking about the disenrollment process.
- Tina Onassis: Well, that to me would come from the district that the child is no longer residing in. They would CC the cyber school or the charter school and they would inform them that they have to send their bills to the district where the student is residing. Just a quick word, it's not unheard of for homeless liaisons for children experiencing homelessness to work together. If a charter or cyber school, if their LEA is investigating a claim for a child that's in your district, it's not unheard of to work together.
- Shane B.: Yeah. Just to clarify, of course, to wrap that question up, I think, just remembering that if that's their school of origin and it's a charter school, they certainly have the right to remain there, should not be disenrolled. Again, just treat it the same as any other LEA.
- Lynda Becker: Okay, thank you. Pamela, I would say, in terms of your specific situation, depending on the circumstances, because we know that the situations are all so different, I would contact your regional coordinator or site coordinator, I'm not sure what county you're in, what region you're in, but I would suggest that you contact your specific regional person to check on that situation. All right, we do have another question from Nola. She says that she has a parent that is in a domestic abuse situation and is asking for help. Does this apply for her situation as well? Apparently, the parent specifically asked for a domestic abuse shelter. I'll just preface before turning it over to Shane and Tina to say that, of course, anyone who is in a shelter would be covered under McKinney-Vento. Shane.
- Tina Onassis: Yes, that's pretty cut and dry.
- Shane B.: Yeah, I think that if they are ... It sounds as though it's a situation where it's a clear causal event. Leaving a home because of abuse is certainly a causal event. If someone, I should have said this earlier in the webinar, but it's important to note that someone can have a causal event happen in their life, whether it be natural disaster or they leave home because of abuse or something like that, eviction. If they land somewhere after that causal event, if they land somewhere that is fixed, regular, and adequate, it's permanent, then it does not qualify under McKinney-Vento as homeless, but in the scenario like you're talking about, if they're going to a shelter, absolutely, it's McKinney-Vento eligible and they should be surrounded with the supports, the rights, the services associated with it, and transportation, all of that.
- Lynda Becker: Okay, I'm not seeing any additional questions at this point. There's still is time, we have a little bit more information to go through, so if anyone comes up with

another question, certainly send that in. Oh, we have another one. This is from Brandon and he's asking, "LEA, what does that stand for?" I can cover that one. That's a local education agency. In terms of McKinney-Vento, an LEA would be any school district, any charter school, meaning either a brick and mortar or a cyber charter school. Also, with McKinney-Vento, it would be any full-time comprehensive voc-tech center, they're not called career and technical centers I guess, CTC's. That is what an LEA is, as well as an intermediate unit would also be considered an LEA.

Every single LEA, and this is per the federal law, must have a homeless liaison designated for their entity, and that is who our regional staff work with on the LEA level to make sure that the folks are trained and to make sure that they know what the McKinney-Vento requirements are. Brandon, I hope that answers that question for you. This question is from, it looks like Michael. Do families need a DMV application completed to provide assistance? I'm assuming that's the Department of Motor Vehicles. I don't have an answer for that, Shane and Tina?

Tina Onassis: This would be something that I will pass along to my social worker if they needed assistance in.

Shane B.: The question is, do they need a DMV? Could you repeat the question? Sorry.

Lynda Becker: Sure. Do families need a DMV application completed to provide assistance?

Shane B.: I've never heard of that. I don't believe so. No.

Tina Onassis: They don't need to provide any paperwork for the district in order for us to help them, if that's the question. If you mean to other outside agencies like, let's say, a community action-type agency or something like that, they wouldn't need a DMV application. They would just need to take their birth certificates for all the children. If there was an eviction, they would take the eviction notice and paperwork like that.

Shane B.: Documentation typically cannot be mandated to be provided to a district in cases McKinney-Vento situations. Even during investigations, even eviction letters, they can be requested, but they cannot be mandated that families provide those things in order to be able to be eligible under McKinney-Vento and services under McKinney-Vento apply no matter what. If they're eligible, they're eligible.

Even with enrollment, I should have pointed out earlier immediate enrollment. Normally, it's required that a family or a student provide birth certificate, residency verification, immunization records, school records. These are all things that if a situation meets the requirements for McKinney-Vento eligibility or if it's a scenario that's being investigated, the student needs to be in a classroom without expecting them to provide all of the normally required documentation.

Lynda Becker: Okay, Shane, Michael actually sent some more information to clarify what he was asking about. I'm not sure if Michael is with a school district or if he's with a

provider, but he says, "I was asking because to get bus service, a family needs some type of proof of residence." Again, with McKinney-Vento ... Oh, he's with a charter school. He's answering. Proof of residence is not something that ... Go ahead, go ahead, Tina.

Tina Onassis: Sorry. They do not require proof of residence. In my district, all I have to do is tell our transportation director that this family has qualified for McKinney-Vento and requires transportation from point A to the district and from the district back to point A and they set it up within 24-hours. We do not require that and it should not be required. That would go against McKinney-Vento.

Shane B.: Correct. It would be hard in a lot of scenarios. It would be very difficult for families to come up with any kind of documentation with the address on it. If they're staying in a motel or shelter, sometimes they just can't come up with any kind of verification of any kind so the districts, and they really do need to work with these situations and get transportation moving. Part of the investigation can be to go to the location to confirm that the student, the family is where they say they are.

Lynda Becker: Right. Just as a reminder for everyone that with McKinney-Vento, immediate enrollment is really the name of the game. Then, in terms of any documentation that you might need, that's something that you work on after you enroll the child. Otherwise, you are disobeying the federal law. Okay, I don't see any other questions. I want to give people a little bit more time. We still have about 25 minutes left in our allotted time. We'll go ahead and move on to the next poll question. If you have questions, which I see one came through, but let's do the next two poll questions, the final poll questions and then we'll come back to the audience questions again.

The question is, should a district, a school district request an eviction notice if the family states they have been or are being evicted? Either yes or no. If you could please answer that question. They're coming in. All right. All the responses are in, although it's changing a little bit still. It looks like 38% yes, people are saying that yes, you should request an eviction notice and 63% are saying no. My response would be no, but I'll let Tina and Shane respond to that.

All right, we'll go ahead to the next poll question. That is, should a district contact the landlord or the building manager to verify a family's living arrangement? Yes or no. Okay, it looks like the responses are pretty much in and it looks like about three quarters of you said no and a quarter of you said yes. Again, my answer to that question would be no, but from the field, I'll ask Tina and Shane to respond.

Tina Onassis: Absolutely not. Do not check with the landlord where they're currently residing because you may end up then creating a situation where you have two homeless families through no fault of the host families own, just by wanting to help, they're going to end up getting put out because it may be a violation of code, it may be in violation of the lease, you can't do that. You don't want to create a double homeless situation.

Shane B.: I'm not sure if we were accidentally on mute for the response to the last question about eviction. I wanted to point out that Tina did say, if it was not heard, that you can request an eviction notice, but you may not mandate it. You can request it, but you cannot require it. That was her response. I just wanted to make sure everybody heard that.

Lynda Becker: Thank you very much. Again, with specific situations, if you have questions, your regional staff are your go-to people for that. Your regional coordinator, and in some instances, in some regions, there are site coordinators. Thank you, Tina and Shane. We did have some more questions that came in. Actually, three more questions came in. This is from Cheryl, and that is, as of July 2015, I thought that if a homeless student moves into your district and is enrolled in a cyber charter school, that the district of origin is responsible for the billing.

I want to preface this. I can turn it over to Tina and Shane, but preface it in terms of we typically defer to the charter accounting folks at the Pennsylvania Department of Education with those questions because we certainly do not get intricately involved with the billing questions. Tina and Shane, do you have anything else to say?

Shane B.: That is the response that I would have given as well. Lynda, thank you. Reaching out to child accounting at Pennsylvania Department of Education is definitely what will be needed in a situation like that.

Lynda Becker: I can say that in terms of the basic education circular for homeless education that was just recently distributed, I think it was maybe in October of last year and I believe a new one is on its way with the federal law ESSA, removing the awaiting foster care eligibility as part of McKinney-Vento, that will be coming out soon, but there is also a child accounting booklet that we have as a resource that you can get from your regional staff as well, but again, Cheryl, I think that you should verify your situation, your question, with your regional staff, but thank you for asking.

The next question is from Nola. Again, she's with a charter school and she wanted to know if transportation is provided for the children and parent because, with the charter school, they give student Trans passes to the student, so I'm assuming that perhaps here in the city, perhaps in Philadelphia, but the younger students are brought to the school by the parent, and the parents said they don't have the money for tokens or the money for the bus. If you are in Philadelphia, I would suggest you be in contact with Al Quarles who is your regional coordinator. He's with the School District of Philadelphia because I know that they do offer Trans passes and I know in other situations, they have been able to offer that to the parent as well for the younger children who can't just go off on the bus by themselves. Tina and Shane, do you have anything else to add?

Shane B.: Yes. I'd like to point out that anytime any barrier exists that would potentially prevent a student from attending school fully, that barrier needs to be removed by the LEA. If you have a student who is perhaps too young to travel on public

transportation by themselves and a parent would be, or someone, responsible adult would need to be accompanying them on the public transportation, then the LEA really should be working that out so that they can be accompanied by someone who can get them to and from school via public transportation.

Certainly, that is additional expense, but if it's necessary for safety, that is part of the McKinney-Vento Act, transportation needs to be provided and it also needs to be a safe option to get the child to and from school.

Lynda Becker: Thank you. Our next question is from Molly. The question is, can homeless students attend field trips without paying for the field trip? Something was mentioned early on about field trips and free meals. Of course, the free meals are a definite requirement, but any student who is experiencing homelessness automatically qualifies for the free meals. I'll actually let Shane and Tina talk about field trips or other things that a homeless student may not necessarily have the money for.

Shane B.: My understanding is, and this is more of a region by region sort of a thing. As funding is available on the regional level, the regional staff may be able to assist with field trips and activities in the school as long as they have an academic value. Things like paying for a student to go to an amusement park with their classmates would not be able to be covered with McKinney-Vento federal funds. However, if it has an academic value that can be verified, certainly, your regional coordinators and site coordinators, they should be, potentially, it depends on funding again, be able to assist with that.

I believe also, Title One may be able to be utilized for that. I would check with your federal folks, the Title One coordinator in your LEA to verify that that is a usage of those funds that would be acceptable. Also, there are school districts and LEAs out there that I've heard of that they have funds specifically for students who are experiencing challenging, financial challenging times so that those funds can be tapped into so that no student gets left behind when all of the other students are going on a trip.

Lynda Becker: Yeah. Again, of course we don't have free flowing money within the regional offices in terms of meeting every single need that a student or a family might have, but the regional staff do have connections with other entities within their region, whether it comes to housing or medical services, you know, any kind of services that the family or the student might need. They're a great resource at the regional level to be able to get you connected. Molly, I would say, this would be a situation if that's a concern and a barrier since the student needs to be able to participate in any activities just as any student of the school would, you should be in contact with your regional staff to find out if they can either get you connected with someone who can help or maybe even actually help you with some funds.

The other thing is that local fund raising often occurs where the school districts might do fundraising activities to raise money so that they have supply of resources that they can help, not only students who are experiencing

homelessness, but also, other vulnerable student populations to help meet their needs. I don't know if that's something that's happening at your area or not.

The next question was from Michael and he asked if the ECYEH conference had occurred yet. Actually, the 2016 conference did occur back in November. We were out in the western part of the state, so I'm sorry if you folks missed that. We are looking at mid-October, probably in the Hershey area in 2017. We'll be getting information out to everyone and it will be posted on the program website as soon as we have that confirmed. Nola did confirm that she was from Philadelphia, so I did give you the name of the person at the School District of Philadelphia and you'll find some links, Nola, at the end of the slides and we'll be going through those soon where you can actually download the map, the regional map, and you'll be able to get Al's phone numbers and his e-mail address from there.

All right, I don't see any other questions, we're going to go ahead and move forward with the rest of the slides, the end of the slides. We still have 15 minutes, though, left in our time this morning so if you have additional questions, be sure to put them in the question pane. I wanted to be sure that you're all aware that there's local, regional, and state assistance available to you in terms of interpreting McKinney-Vento and making sure that the services are being provided to the students and the families. Again, if you have eligibility questions, make sure that you discuss those with your regional and/or site coordinator for your region. I would hope that many of you have attended a regional or local training regarding homeless education. That's one of the main roles of our regional staff is to be sure again that the LEAs, the school staff, provider staff, and basically the general community knows about the needs of homeless students and making sure that people are aware of the McKinney-Vento requirements.

I'm glad that Michael had asked about the program conference, the annual state conference, because that is a great resource where we bring in not only presenters from within Pennsylvania, but from across the nation to talk about what the current trends are, what are good strategies and options for providing services for students and families experiencing homelessness. Here's a copy of our map. If you don't know which region your entity, your school, or your agency is in, you can see this here. Again, there's some links that we're providing as well where you can see the back portion of this map that actually has all of the contact information. We actually have over 20 people, I think it is, who are responsible for helping you with McKinney-Vento on the local level and on the regional level.

Here are some resources for you both on the state and national level. There is a website with program resources and where you will find the regional map and other things here at the center. The same information as well as any of the guidance, including the basic education circular, et cetera, can be found under the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. Then, there are also national resources. There's the National Association for the Education of Homeless

Children and Youth, the National Center on Homeless Education which is actually on the federal level. They're responsible for helping the states, helping LEAs, helping parents, et cetera, to effectuate the McKinney-Vento law.

There's also the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and then a new entity, the SchoolHouse Connection is also a resource for you. You can get legislative updates, you can get programmatic resources, you can get best practices from many, if not all, of these websites. Next slide please. Are there any additional questions? I don't see any coming through on the questions pane. Just know that you can submit questions to your regional staff at any time. Next slide please. For assistance, again there is a state coordinator, his name is Storm Camara at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. You can certainly be in contact with him. His contact information is there. My contact information is, so is Shane's and Tina's. I still do not see any additional questions, so next slide, please.

Okay, I think we might be missing a slide, but I'll go ahead and wrap us up. I want to thank both Tina and Shane for providing us their expertise today. We really, really appreciate it. Again, if you have questions about how to investigate, Tina is definitely the person that you should talk to with her background. With eligibility questions, your regional staff are the best folks to go to. I want to thank you all for joining us today and remind everyone that the archived recording will be available at the ACCU website within the week. We will also send an e-mail with the link to the recording, as well as all the handouts to all of the webinar registrants and liaisons.

When you receive the electronic evaluation via e-mail, please take a couple of minutes to complete it as your feedback helps us to continue to offer professional development of the highest quality. Thank you again for joining us and this concludes today's webinar. Have a great day.