

Children & Youth Funding Report

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Shelters Forfeit Federal Funds to Maintain Anonymity for Clients

Domestic-violence shelters across the country opt out of a new homelessness data-gathering system to protect the identity of battered women and children, says a new report by the Housing & Urban Development Dept. Millions of dollars in federal funding are jeopardized.

HUD wants shelters to provide info on abused women and children for its Homeless Management Information System. HMIS is a national database which allowed HUD to refine its fuzzy goal of ending homelessness into concentrating on the chronically homeless (*CYF*, 11/11p9).

A new HMIS report shows that just 78% of domestic violence shelters are participating in the survey, which is well below the participation rates of other types of shelters – the Transitional Housing Providers category posted a 98% participation rate, for example.

Domestic violence advocates say they are wary of the data collection because it destroys anonymity and will scare off women and children in need.

In North Carolina, the American Civil Liberties Union chapter has not warmly embraced the effort. ACLU officials say the new database would subject clients to a level of tracking that is normally used against criminals. All states are working on the systems.

HUD has offered solutions to maintain anonymity – such as coding the names and offering technical assistance – but shelters still are opting out of the program and a portion of \$1.3 billion in annual homeless funding (*CYF*, 10/28p8).

With HMIS, HUD seeks to get an accurate count of America's homeless to streamline services. The data has helped to show how much money is spent on people who are homeless for years, using emergency rooms for medical care and bouncing in and out of jails and mental institutions. Generally, it's more cost effective to work on meeting their needs and housing them, the research shows.

Most states began collecting the info in January.

Info: HMIS, www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis or ACLU-NC 919/834-3390, e-mail at aclunc@z-wave.net or www.acluofnorthcarolina.org.