

2,627

Unaccompanied
Homeless Students
in WA
(Primarily Ages
15-21)

HB 2396 (McBride, Caldier)

Access to nonemergency, outpatient, primary health care services for unaccompanied homeless youth under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

**How
does it
work?**

- Student presents a basic health care need — a sports physical or a potential hearing loss or a painful, sore throat
- School nurse, counselor, or homeless student liaison, following federal law, identifies student as “homeless” and “unaccompanied”
- School nurse, counselor, or homeless student liaison gives authorization for appointment and written notice to the healthcare provider
- Healthcare provider decides whether to provide care to student

HB-2396 exempts school personnel from responsibility for healthcare services and payment



DEFINITIONS

“**Primary Health Care**” means routine health care services, including screening, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment for the purpose of promotion of health, and detection and management of disease or injury (**RCW 48.150.010**).

HB-2396 covers only nonemergency, outpatient, primary care services and specifically excludes elective surgeries.

“**Homeless**” means without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as set forth in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (**RCW 43.330.702**).

“**Unaccompanied Youth**” means youth or young adult experiencing homelessness while not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (**RCW 43.330.702**).

HB-2396 does not require healthcare providers to give care — healthcare providers must decide for themselves whether to give care

How HB-2396 Could Help an Unaccompanied, Homeless Youth*

About Ben: Ben is a high school junior in Tacoma, Washington. His teachers like him and he is a good student. He maintains a 3.3 GPA while taking challenging classes like honors physics.

Recently, Ben's mom lost her job, and they couldn't afford to stay in their apartment any longer. Ben's mom and little sister went to stay with Ben's aunt in Oregon. Ben's aunt said did not have room for a teenage boy. So Ben started staying with his friend John. John's parents are nice, but Ben is afraid of being a burden and getting kick out, especially since John's parents said this is only a temporary arrangement.

Ben tries to alleviate his presence at John's house by staying late participating in after school clubs and activities. After class one day, the school coach saw Ben playing soccer and offered him a position on the varsity soccer team to play goalie.

Only one problem: Ben needs a sports physical. Ben has not seen his mom in three months and her phone is shut off so he does not know where to find her...

When Ben keeps giving the coach excuses for not turning in his sports physical, Ben's coach realizes something is wrong. Ben's coach calls the Homeless Student Liaison for the Tacoma School District. The Homeless Student Liaison meets with Ben and, using state-wide protocol developed under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, identifies Ben as an unaccompanied, homeless student. The Homeless Student Liaison agrees to help Ben make a doctor's appointment under the new law (HB-2396).

At the appointment, the Homeless Student Liaison provides authorization and written notice to the doctor. The doctor meets Ben. The doctor decides that while office policy is not to accept patients on Medicaid, the doctor will make an exception for Ben. Ben turns in his sports physical, just in time for the first game of the season.

About Gwen: Gwen is a high school senior in Othello, Washington. She is the secretary of the student government and works part-time at the local coffee shop. Gwen has struggled with her school work and currently holds a 2.4 GPA. Gwen is the mother of a seven-month old baby, Meadow.

Last year, Gwen was kicked out of her mother's house because she became pregnant. Gwen lives with Meadow in the basement of her boyfriend's house. The household is chaotic and Gwen is not sure how long they can stay. She hopes to have enough money saved up to move into her own apartment when she turns 18.

Gwen received prenatal care and she can authorize medical care for her daughter, but Gwen cannot get medical care for herself. Gwen recently asked to switch seats because she cannot see the chalkboard.

Gwen's teacher sends her to talk to the school nurse. The school nurse suggests Gwen get an eye exam. Using state-wide protocol developed under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, identifies Gwen as an unaccompanied, homeless student. The school nurse help's Gwen make an appointment and provides authorization and written notice to the optometrist under the new law (HB-2396).

At the appointment, the optometrist graciously donates her time and gives Gwen a full eye exam. The optometrist diagnoses Gwen with astigmatism. The optometrist works with the school nurse to find a charity that supplies individuals who are homeless with eye glasses at no cost.

Gwen gets glasses and her teacher immediately notices an improvement in her class participation.

** Names, places, and identifying characteristics such as illness are changed to maintain anonymity and to provide hypothetical examples for policymakers.*