



# THE CONNECTICUT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Barbara S. Bunk; I am a psychologist, co-chair of CPA's Legislative Committee, and I have worked for more than 20 years with children who have been abused and/or neglected by adult caretakers. **On behalf of CPA I ask you to oppose *Bill #5529, An Act Concerning Youth Who Run Away.***

Bill #5529 states, "Upon determination that a youth is a youth in crisis because the youth has without just cause run away from the parental home...the court may...order the youth in crisis to be subject to the control of...parents..." The question is, how do we determine the root of the problem? And what if the parents are the problem?

None of us like to think of parents or caretakers who are abusive or neglectful. Yet we know that it happens. Many times we find it is the reason for running away. We should not risk inadvertently returning one youth to an abusive household.

Any psychologist or other mental health professional who works with children is aware that running away from home is always a complicated problem to address. Clearly, the youth has been unhappy about some aspect of his or her home life. The unhappiness can of course be related to something straightforward such as disagreement about curfew. More often, however, run away behavior is a more complex symptom of serious family dysfunction. Children and adolescents often do not or cannot speak about their family's poor boundaries, inappropriate discipline, or emotional neglect. Sometimes they do, and we – the professionals – listen; often we do not hear or understand their communication.

Behavior is a 'code', a type of communication that is more reliable with children than either words or emotions. Troubled youth are often angry and seeking independence, so their feelings and words can blur the real issues. Running away communicates that the youth cannot tolerate the home, or that the parents have been unable to meet the child's needs.

This bill, *An Act Concerning Youth Who Run Away* assumes that parents will always act properly while parenting, yet we know this to be untrue. For fear that we unintentionally put some runaway youth in danger by sending them home to abusive parents, CPA urges you to oppose Bill #5529.

Barbara S Bunk Ph D