

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF COMMITTEE BILL NO. 5915  
AN ACT CONCERNING "STUCK KIDS"

February 19, 2009

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and the Director of the Center's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state. In addition, I am the chair of the Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth,<sup>1</sup> a statewide group of professionals interested in improving access to services and supports for runaway and homeless youth in the state of Connecticut. The Team is comprised of state agencies such as the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Court Support Services Division, and the State Department of Education, as well as private providers throughout the state including Kids in Crisis, RYASAP, The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, the Village for Families and Children as well as others.

**I write today to urge you to support Committee Bill No. 5915, "An Act Concerning 'Stuck Kids'."** The Center is supporting this bill because we believe it will improve Connecticut's ability to provide supports and services to an invisible population. We also believe this bill will bring much-needed attention to the needs of runaway and homeless youth in this state. The bill seeks to require DCF to review and monitor the placement of every out-of-state, runaway and homeless child and youth in DCF custody, care or supervision and to issue an annual report to the General Assembly.

Why do we call runaway and homeless youth "the invisible population"? This is because there is very little known about these kids in Connecticut. They are invisible because:

- there is little data on this population
- there are few services for this population
- there is little coordination between a multitude of systems and agencies serving this population
- there is little awareness of this population in Connecticut

Who are Connecticut's runaway and homeless youth? They are youth in the care of the DCF, youth who have been physically and sexually abused, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth who have been kicked out of their homes after "coming out", adolescent boys who are not allowed into family homeless shelters, and youth who are

<sup>1</sup> The Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth was convened in the summer of 2008 in response to a request by the American Bar Association's Committee on Homelessness and Poverty as well as the National Network for Youth that each state bring together advocates to affect systemic change on behalf of runaway and homeless youth.



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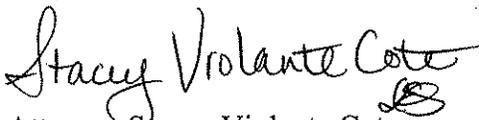
victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth states that parental abuse and neglect is a primary cause of homelessness among unaccompanied youth (homeless youth who are on their own).<sup>2</sup> The National Network for Youth estimates that according to studies of a homeless youth sample, 33% had been in foster care, 51% had been physically abused, and 60% of girls and 23% of boys had been sexually abused.<sup>3</sup>

In Connecticut, we do not have an accurate number of runaway and homeless youth. We know that the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), a database maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, reported on October 20, 2008 that there were 236 active runaway cases and 4,300 purged records for runaway cases in Connecticut for 2008. (Please see attached data sheet.) We also know that the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management and Information System reported a total of 209 runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut for 2007.<sup>4</sup> A report from the Office of Legislative Research indicates that though the number is difficult to precisely count, there are more than 350 unaccompanied homeless children under the age of 18 in Connecticut.<sup>5</sup>

**This bill would help to shore-up at least one source of the data necessary to understand the needs of runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut.** DCF's data of runaway kids in its care is equally inconsistent as the numbers cited above. *The number of runaway incidents of children/youth in DCF care includes a 2007 total of 1,522 and a 2006 total of 1,815.*<sup>6</sup> However, this data intermingles youth who have left DCF placements for short periods of time and those who have truly runaway from DCF placements. Since we know that the runaway and homeless youth population is closely tied to the child welfare system, asking for an accurate count of runaway and homeless youth in the care of DCF makes sense. This bill will help to move us from a discussion of an "invisible population" to a discussion about the supports and services needed to effectively address issues of runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Attorney Stacey Violante Cote  
Director, Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic  
Chair, CT Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth

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<sup>2</sup> "Using What We Know: Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth." 39, Julianelle, Patricia, The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, February 2008, available at [http://www.naehcy.org/dl/uwwk\\_youth.pdf](http://www.naehcy.org/dl/uwwk_youth.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> "Unaccompanied Youth: Fast Facts" National Network for Youth, citing YouthCare, Inc., 1998, available at [http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet\\_Unacompanied\\_Youth.pdf](http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet_Unacompanied_Youth.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> This number is believed to be an underestimate as it is only includes reports from grantees of a national grant to work with runaway and homeless youth

<sup>5</sup> "Poverty, Homelessness, and Children." CT Office of Legislative Research (July 7, 2008).

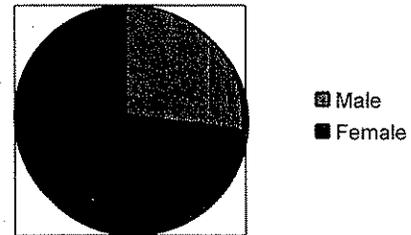
<sup>6</sup> Data provided by DCF to the CT Team: Runaway and Homeless Youth in December 2008.

# How many runaway and homeless children and youth are in Connecticut? *We don't know!*

## What *DO* we know?

### National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)

<b>CT 2007 Total:</b>	<b>209</b>
Male:	77
Female:	132
<12 years:	22
12-14 years:	68
15-16 years:	87
17-18 years:	32

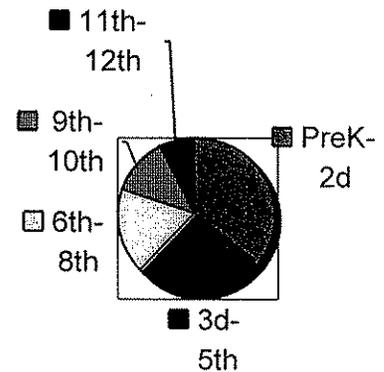


### CT Department of Education

Homeless children/youths enrolled in public school  
(132 LEAs not reporting)

**2007-08 School Year Total: 2017**

Pre-k – 2d grade:	722
Grades 3-5:	532
Grades 6-8:	367
Grades 9-10:	253
Grades 11-12:	143

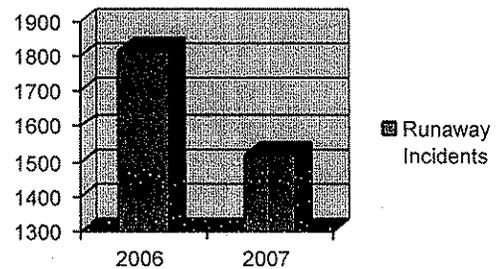
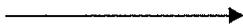


### CT Department of Children and Families

Runaway incidents of children/youth in DCF care

**2007 Total: 1,522**

2006 Total: 1815



### CT Court Support Services Division

Runaways (unique clients):

FWSN 10/1/07 – 9/30/08:	240
YIC 1/1/08 – 11/15/08:	147

### National Crime Information Center (NCIC)

Active runaway cases on 10/20/08: 236

Purged runaway records for 2008: 4,300