

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 5514, Sections 14 and 15,
AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH
STATUTES**

March 21, 2012

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,¹ 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 including 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 The Center for Children's Advocacy, The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, RYASAP, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, True Colors, Women and Families Center, Partnership for Strong Communities, as well as others.

I am testifying today to urge you to support Raised Bill No. 5514, "An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes." Specifically, I am testifying in support of Sections 14 and 15, which amend the current statutes to allow homeless youth who are under eighteen years old to access their birth certificates. The proposed change would allow certain professionals including school district homeless liaisons and the director or designees of youth and adult shelters to certify that the youth is homeless, thus allowing the youth to directly request a copy of his/her birth certificate. This process mirrors the process outlined in the federal College Cost Reduction Act for unaccompanied homeless youth to access federal financial aid for college.



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By all accounts, the number of homeless youth has increased in CT. (Please see attached data.) 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).² The National Network for Youth estimates that according to studies of a homeless youth sample, 33% had been in foster care, 51%

¹ 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.

² "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.

had been physically abused, and 60% of girls and 23% of boys had been sexually abused.³ We also know that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth are over-represented among the homeless youth population. Multiple studies have found that one out of every five homeless youth (20 percent) is LGBT-identified. This is highly disproportionate to the estimated percentage of LGBT youth in the general population, which is approximately 10 percent.⁴

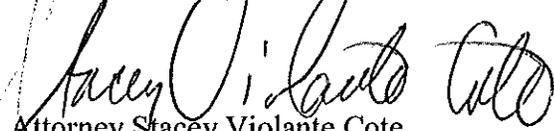
The dangers for minors who are living on their own are many. Homeless youth are targets to be lured into the life of prostitution (also called domestic minor sex trafficking), they are at risk for physical abuse, sexual abuse, illness and suicide. Removing barriers for homeless youth to access supports and services is critical.

For some homeless youth, school may be the only safe and stable environment available. Yet, without a parent or guardian to assist them, enrollment in school may be denied or delayed, particularly when the youth does not have access to required enrollment documents like a birth certificate. Connecticut State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths has indicated that the proposed changes would help both school districts and homeless students to expedite school enrollment. The American Bar Association and the National Network for Youth recently published a book entitled "Runaway and Homeless Youth and the Law: Model State Statutes," where they emphasize the importance of homeless youth having access to identification documents, including birth certificates. The book also notes other states who have provided for flexibility in birth certificate requests (citing Pennsylvania, Maryland, Mississippi, and Texas).⁵

This bill would remove one of the many obstacles faced by unaccompanied homeless youth who are attempting to access supports to move out of homelessness. I get the calls from youth who are on their own and cannot get copies of their birth certificates in order to register in school, seek employment, get a state identification card, apply for food assistance or cash assistance, or become involved in a job training opportunity. Providers for homeless youth also tell us that youth who cannot access their birth certificates can experience delays in accessing health insurance and thus needed mental or medical health care. **Please support sections 14 and 15 of Raised Bill No. 5514. This bill provides a no-cost way to eliminate obstacles for homeless youth.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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Director, Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic
Chair, CT Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth

³ "Unaccompanied Youth: Fast Facts" National Network for Youth, citing YouthCare, Inc., 1998, available at http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet_Unacompanied_Youth.pdf.

⁴ "Incidence and Vulnerability of LGBTQ Homeless Youth," National Alliance to End Homelessness, Solutions Brief, December 8, 2008.

⁵ Horton-Newell, Amy, Meyer, Katie & Trupin, Casey. "Runaway and Homeless Youth and the Law: Model State Statutes," pp 111-113 (2009).

Connecticut's Invisible Population: Homeless Children and Youth

- This is the invisible population because no one knows how many unaccompanied homeless youth are in CT (youth who are on their own).
- Most youth are "couch surfing" and staying with friends or relatives for short periods of time.
- Homeless youth are counted differently by each agency, or not counted at all.
- Homeless youth are at risk for sex abuse, being lured into prostitution, physical abuse, illness and suicide.

What We Do Know:

Homeless children/youth enrolled in public school is increasing.

CT Department of Education
2010-11 School Year Total: 2942



Many children/youth run away from DCF care.

CT Department of Children and Families
2010/2011 Total Incidents: 2984

Minors are victims of prostitution.

Reported to DCF (2010-2011): 66

18-21 y.o.'s are in adult shelters/housing.

CT Homeless Management Information System
Fiscal Year 2011: 666

Some minors are in the few youth shelter beds in CT.

Total in Youth Shelters (Oct '10- Sept '11): 251
National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management
Information System (RHYMIS)

Male:	102
Female:	149
<12 years:	33
12-14 years:	88
15-16 years:	85
17-18 years:	43
>18 years:	2

