

Testimony of Women and Families Center
In Support of HB #5514 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to Public Health Statutes
Kristen Granatek, Director of Project R.E.A.C.H. and Shelter Services, Women & Families Center
Public Health Committee, March 21, 2012

My name is Kristen Granatek and I am the Director of Project R.E.A.C.H. and Shelter Services for Women & Families Center. WFC is a multi-faceted human service agency providing services throughout Middlesex County and the Greater New Haven area. Included in our services is Project R.E.A.C.H., a program for runaway and homeless youth. Project R.E.A.C.H. supports this vulnerable population through Street Outreach and Shelter Services. Street Outreach seeks out runaway, homeless and at-risk youth in neighborhoods, parks and other areas where they congregate to provide survival aid, individual counseling, case management and referrals to community services including emergency shelter. Shelter Services, set to open in late March, will be a 6 bed short term emergency shelter for youth ages 13-17. Sheltered Youth will receive daily supervision and support, as well as extensive Case Management to help them move from homelessness to a stable long term living arrangement.

The runaway and homeless youth that we serve face many barriers. One of the most common ones is having access to identification, including their birth certificate. Youth who are on their own have left home for many reasons. They may have been kicked out of their home after "coming out" to their parents as gay, lesbian or bisexual. They may be running from abuse or neglect. Or they may have been separated from their family who is also experiencing homelessness. Many of them have no identification at all. It is our experience that parents or guardians often hold their child's birth certificate. The parent or guardian may refuse to turn it over to the youth, particularly in situations in which the youth is seeking emancipation. In some circumstances, the parent or guardian cannot be located.

Youth who do not have access to their birth certificate are unable to obtain permanent identification, including a social security card, passport or driver's license. This hinders the process of enrolling in school, getting a job and getting access to needed entitlements. The changes proposed under HB 5514: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to Public Health Statutes will provide runaway and homeless youth with a legal mechanism for obtaining a birth certificate without the consent of their parent or guardian. This is an important step toward eliminating some of the barriers that they face.

We urge you to support Section 15 of HB 5514 as it is critical to effectively supporting Connecticut's runaway and homeless youth in their quest for stability.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Kristen Granatek, Director of Project R.E.A.C.H. and Shelter Services

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