



Joint Committee on Public Health, March 15, 2013

Testimony of Nichole Guerra on HB 6482, An Act Concerning Birth Certificates for Homeless Youth

Sen. Gerratana, Rep. Johnson, Sen. Welch, Rep. Srinivasan and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nichole Guerra, and I am a Policy Analyst at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC), a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and fostering best practices in community development.

I am here to testify in support of House Bill 6482, An Act Concerning Birth Certificates for Homeless Youth. This bill will allow unaccompanied homeless youth access to their birth certificates with the help of a school homeless liaison, a shelter provider, or provider to runaway and homeless youth. Current law states that a minor cannot obtain their birth certificate without a parent/guardian or grandparent, which is virtually impossible for unaccompanied youth who are homeless and living on their own. This creates obstacles to accessing mental health treatment, complicates school registration, and makes it almost impossible for a minor to obtain state issued identification.

The PSC staffs and manages Reaching Home, the campaign to build the political and civic will to preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut. Reaching Home is focused on ending homelessness among youth as part of its effort to implement Opening Doors –CT, the state's blueprint for ending homelessness that is aligned with the federal Opening Doors plan.

Reaching Home actively supports statewide efforts to identify unaccompanied homeless youth in Connecticut and better understand their needs through its Runaway and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Work Group, a diverse group of stakeholders including key state agencies, advocacy intermediaries and direct service providers. This legislation promotes our overall vision of quantifying and highlighting the problem, pinpointing and addressing systemic barriers, and developing a responsive service system for these vulnerable kids. It will allow unaccompanied homeless youth to access work, health and support services at a time when they have nothing else.

These youth face multiple dangers, such as exposure to violence and drug use, sexual exploitation, and trafficking. They are 2 to 3 times more likely to be assaulted or raped, 7 times more likely to die from AIDS, and 16 times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than the general youth population. We urge you to support this policy as one step toward protecting them from the risks of living on the streets and avoiding further disconnection from mainstream institutions and supports.

I am available to address any question.

Thank you very much.