



March 14, 2013

Testimony in Support of Bill No. 6482

An Act Concerning Birth Certificates for Homeless Youth

My name is John Johnson Jr. I am the Project Coordinator of Project R.E.A.C.H. and Shelter Services for Women & Families Center in Meriden, CT. Project R.E.A.C.H. is a program for runaway, at-risk, and homeless youth ages 13-21. Services are provided through two systems: street outreach and shelter services.

Street outreach canvases streets, train/bus stations, parks, schools, and neighborhoods where youth “hang out”. At the point of contact; our staff provides services such as counseling, service linkages to community programs, survival aid (soap, toothbrush/paste, wash cloth, deodorant, etc.) and food. Shelter services provide emergency shelter for youth ages 13-17. Shelter services assist youth with identifying long term living arrangements. This could include: reunification with parents/guardians/relatives, independent living, Job Corps, etc. Aftercare support is also provided once a youth exits shelter.

Runaway and homeless youth who live on the streets face many issues. A majority of them do not attend school on a regular basis, very few have any belongings when they do leave, and for some, it could be months that go by before they are able to take their medications again. In my experience; the one item at the top of the list for many youth who have left their home is identification, including their birth certificate.

Parents or guardians often have possession of the youth’s birth certificate. Because the youth has left home, his/her birth certificate is not returned to them to “show them” – blocking the right to independence. In some cases, the parent or guardian cannot be found. Having access to one’s birth certificate is especially important when the youth is seeking employment, emancipation, obtaining other forms of identification (passport, driver’s license, state I.D., social security card), or needed entitlements (food stamps, etc.).

This bill would provide a legal channel for runaway and homeless youth to take hold-of, manage, and secure the necessary steps for a stable, healthy, productive future.

We implore you to **support Bill No. 6482** and assist us in supporting Connecticut’s runaway and homeless youth.

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Respectfully submitted,

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