

# Center for Children's Advocacy

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## H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015

### **Address the immediate safety needs of kids in crisis by funding the Department of Children and Families to Implement the Homeless Youth Program established in 2010 and codified in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-62a.**

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide private, non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic legal representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and Director of the Teen Legal Advocacy Project, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state. In addition, I am the chair of the Homeless Youth Workgroup of the Reaching Home campaign, the statewide campaign for preventing and ending homelessness. The Campaign developed a public-private partnership to implement a statewide framework to prevent and end homelessness based on the federal Opening Doors plan. The workgroup consists of state agency partners, private providers and advocates. More information about the Reaching Home Campaign and the workgroup can be found here: <http://pschousing.org/runaway-and-homeless-youth-workgroup>.

**I write today to urge you to restore the funding for the homeless youth program established in statute in 2010, see Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-62a.** Re-funding this program would allow the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to establish two regional teams to provide outreach and a drop-in component, including youth drop-in centers with walk-in access to crisis interventions and ongoing supportive services, for youth who are homeless. This program would also provide limited longer term supports through a transitional living component to help maintain youths' stability. Through this model, young people can receive support that would *not* require commitment to state services. The cost for this is \$1million. (Please see attached Fiscal Note from the Office of Fiscal Analysis.)

The Homeless Youth Program passed in 2010 with wide bipartisan support. Because the program design was previously established and DCF has already written the Request for Proposals, this program could be implemented very quickly.

We know more than we did in 2010 about the critical need for these services. The 2013 study, "Invisible No More: Creating opportunities for youth who are homeless," conducted by The Consultation Center at Yale University<sup>1</sup>, documented both the lack of crisis supports in Connecticut and the vulnerability of these youth. The study interviewed 98 homeless youth as well as key stakeholders and found:

- 32% dropped out of school;
- 12% reported that their school told them they could no longer attend;
- Several youth reported that they had traded sex for money (7.1%), a place to stay (8.2%); and drugs or alcohol (4.1%);
- 23.5% of the youth first experienced sexual intercourse at age 12 or under;
- 66% were unemployed and 26% were employed part-time;
- 41% reported being in their current living situation for less than 3 months;
- 70% reported moving two times or more in the past year; and
- ¼ of the young people reported considering suicide over the last year.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon, D, Hunter, B. (2013). "Invisible No More: Creating opportunities for youth who are homeless." Available at: <http://www.pschousing.org/files/InvisibleNoMoreReport.pdf>.

These statistics are sobering. They tell us that without a safe place to go, homeless youth in Connecticut are falling through the cracks of the various systems they touch.

The data is echoed in the voices of the kids who call me on a regular basis saying they have no place to go. I received one of these calls this week from a young man named "Brian." He is eighteen years old and a senior in high school in Hartford who cannot live with his mother because she is substance abusing. He is staying on friends' couches as he tries to finish high school. He has never been in DCF care. He wanted to know where he can stay. All I could tell him was an adult homeless shelter. "No way," he said. As with most teens I talk with, he did not feel safe in an adult shelter, and for good reason. Testimony from the 2010 bill included young people describing victimization in adult shelters. (Please see testimony of Gambrell Francois: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/KIDdata/Tmy/2010SB-00292-R000302-Gambarell%20Francois-TMY.PDF>)

Another young person who recently called my office was "Angie" from New Haven. Her parents are homeless and staying with friends who do not have room for her. She is seventeen years old, staying on friends' couches and trying to finish high school. Her school social worker said she does very well in school but recently her grades were suffering as she moved around. She had no place to go that night. Luckily, because she was in New Haven, we were able to connect her with one of the few programs for homeless youth in Connecticut.

Currently, there are only four providers in the state dedicated to runaway and homeless youth. They are located in Bridgeport, New Haven, Meriden and Cos Cob (serving lower Fairfield County). There are no runaway and homeless youth providers in Hartford.

Because of this, the Reaching Home Campaign and the Center for Children's Advocacy have secured private funding to embark on a comprehensive planning process to build service capacity and integrate services for homeless youth. This multi-level process will design a comprehensive, action-oriented plan, based on the framework developed by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, which will concretely address youths' needs for stable housing, permanent connections, employment and education, and social-emotional well-being.

As we embark on this critical planning process we are mindful that youth like Brian and Angie cannot wait. We have a well-planned program for crisis response that can be implemented without delay. We urge you to fund this critical need as time is of the essence.  
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stacey Violante Cote

**OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS**

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sSB-292

AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS YOUTH.

**OFA Fiscal Note**

**State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 11 \$	FY 12 \$
Children & Families, Dept.	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
Various State Agencies	Various - Cost Avoidance	Potential	Potential

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:**

Municipalities	Effect	FY 11 \$	FY 12 \$
Various Municipalities	Cost Avoidance	Potential	Potential

**Explanation**

The bill grants discretionary authority to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to establish a program for homeless youth and youth at-risk of homelessness. As no funding has been included within sHB 5018 (the Revised FY 11 Budget, as favorably reported by the Appropriations Committee) for this purpose, implementation would not be expected until such time that resources allow.

Program costs would vary with the number of youth served. While reliable counts of homeless youth are not available, a Department of Housing and Urban Development survey found 367 unaccompanied children under eighteen in Connecticut in 2005.

For comparison purposes, estimated approximate annual costs of service types required by the bill are:

	Annual Cost
Drop-in Programs, per site	\$20,000

Emergency Youth Shelter, per bed	\$55,000
Transitional Living, per bed	\$62,050
Public Outreach Campaign	\$35,000

Following implementation, the department would be able to produce the required results-based-accountability report card without incurring a fiscal impact.

Section 2 renders immune from civil or criminal liability any public agency serving a homeless child or youth, after making reasonable efforts to contact the parent/guardian for consent, unless consent is refused or withdrawn. This could result in savings for state or municipal entities by precluding litigation and/or judgment awards or settlements.

***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

Sources:	Office of Legislative Research, "Poverty, Homelessness, and Children." July, 2008.
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