

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 14, 2014 Hearing on H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO
STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015
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Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Representative Abercrombie, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), and for your consideration of matters of importance to runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut.

I would like to encourage you to address the immediate safety needs of kids in crisis by funding the Homeless Youth Program established in 2010 and codified in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-62a. I urge you to reinstate this funding in the Department of Children and Families budget.

Numerous children and youth are being identified right now in CT without a safe place to go in times of crisis. These runaway and homeless youth are a hidden population, often not appearing to be homeless, attempting to fit in among their peers and not draw attention. Many fear DCF or foster care. They are often not connected to formal supports, either because they are unaware of resources or avoid the limited available services. Some runaway and homeless youth are not able to attend school. They are at extremely high risk of being physically or sexually assaulted and victimized. They may engage in prostitution or survival sex or become victims of human trafficking. Runaway and homeless youth often couch surf, spending weeks at a time sleeping at friends' or acquaintances' homes. Those without other alternatives will seek out abandoned buildings, unlocked cars or parks. They have extremely limited options, with few dedicated shelter beds available to them and insufficient outreach services to find them and provide support.

The 2013 study, "Invisible No More: Creating Opportunities for Youth who are Homeless," conducted by The Consultation Center at Yale University, documented both the lack of crisis supports for youth who are homeless and the vulnerability of these youth. The study interviewed 98 homeless youth and found:

- 32% dropped out of school;
- 12% reported that their school told them they could no longer attend;

- 66% were unemployed and 26% were employed part-time;
- ¼ of the young people reported considering suicide over the last year;
- 7.1% reported that they had traded sex for money and 8.2% traded sex for a place to stay

This is an unacceptable situation for any youth in Connecticut.

Refunding Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-62a would provide funding for DCF to establish critical services for runaway and homeless youth. This would include:

- two regional teams to provide outreach, looking for these youth and meeting them where they are for services
- youth drop-in centers with walk-in access to crisis interventions and ongoing supportive services
- Outreach, host home and respite options to confront the immediate crisis facing these youth
- Limited longer term supports through a transitional living component to help maintain their stability and inform service capacity planning

Youth receiving these services through DCF would not be required to be committed to state services in order to receive support.

A commitment of \$1 million is needed in the DCF budget to establish these critical services. They will eliminate significant gaps in available resources for runaway and homeless youth and serve some of our state's most vulnerable young people.

I urge to fully fund the Homeless Youth Program in the Department of Children and Families budget. Thank you.