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The Connection

Community-based Services, Advocacy
and Research for Connecticut

My Name is Kathleen Savino and I am the Director of Women and Children Services and Homeless Youth Programs at The Connection Inc., a statewide non-profit organization. I offer the following testimony in support of SB 408: An Act Concerning Youth Homelessness.

First, I would like to thank the committee for continuing to support homeless youth services, and for taking up this bill, which tackles an extremely significant statewide, community issue.

Throughout my career, I have worked with the most vulnerable youth in the communities in which I have served, and most recently, over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to work with homeless or at-risk youth in Connecticut. As such, I have vested interest in the passage of this bill.

Despite the overall wealth of our state, Connecticut grapples with significant income disparity among our residents. Historically, several providers, primarily in the southern region of the state, have received federal funding for Runaway and Homeless Youth services. This funding is limited and nationally competitive. While it provides some services, it should be noted that the services offered are not comprehensive enough to tackle this issue. This year, Connecticut received a cut in federal funds, and will lose already existing programs to assist our homeless youth. Recognizing that these issues require a statewide response, funding for homeless youth services was allocated during last fiscal year. Using this funding, and under the direction of The Department of Children and Families, Connecticut has increased services for both system and non-system at-risk youth, in the form of street outreach in Hartford (an area that has historically received no funding to conduct outreach to homeless youth despite the significant amount of risk factors that the community holds that correlates specifically with a high instance of homelessness among youth); emergency housing (ie, host homes where youth can reside temporarily with families); and more longer term programs to assist at-risk or unstably housed youth in becoming self-sufficient. We have been working with community partners to target specific high risk groups, including youth who are sex-trafficking victims, and also LGBTQ youth. Specifically, The Connection has been working with True Colors to identify and train LGBTQ host home families so that youth who identify from that community have the opportunity to be placed with a host home with a family who identifies as LGBTQ or is an identified straight ally. While our services have grown thanks largely in part to the additional homeless youth funding allocated last fiscal year, we continue to see large numbers of youth referred to our services daily. Simply put, every time we get someone off our waitlist, we have 3 more youth who are placed on it. Since its inception 3 years ago, our program boasts a 75% successful discharge rate and last fiscal year, on average, 77% of our youth were “connected” or employed and/or enrolled in school. By continuing to invest in homeless youth funding, we provide these vulnerable youth with the opportunity to change the course of their life and become contributing members of the community—a shift that moves youth from dependence on the system, to independence.

As an agency who provides these services, I can attest that there is a significant need for on-going, comprehensive services to ameliorate homelessness among youth and young adults. While the point of entry for many of these youth is through a former social worker from the Department of Children and Families, we must ensure that our state systems are working together to address the issue, before, during and after a youth is identified as unstably housed.



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Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen Savino, Psy.D.

Director of Women and Children Services & Homeless Youth Services