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The Honorable Senator Gary A. Winfield
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
Legislative Office Building, Room 3800
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

The Honorable Representative Larry B. Butler
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
Legislative Office Building, Room 5001
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

February 3, 2015

Re: **SUPPORT for SB408, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign before the Joint Committee on Housing in support of Proposed Act Concerning Youth Homelessness.**

Dear Chairperson Winfield and Chairperson Butler:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC believes that all youth deserve a safe and welcoming place to stay, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. HRC, on behalf of our more than 18,000 members in Connecticut, thanks you for allowing us to submit testimony in favor of SB408, which will help create culturally competent services for LGBT homeless youth. We urge you to swiftly pass this legislation.

Homelessness remains one of the most urgent issues facing our community's LGBT youth. According to one study, LGBT youth make up as much as 40% of homeless youth served by service providers.ⁱ In a national survey of transgender and gender non-conforming people, 19% had experienced homelessness, with significantly higher rates for transgender people of color.ⁱⁱ SB 408 will require the Connecticut Commissioners of Housing, Children and Families, and Social Services to develop a plan to ameliorate overall youth homelessness and specifically address LGBT youth homelessness. This is a critical step toward providing necessary support for our most vulnerable youth.

LGBT homeless youth face substantial barriers when seeking services and housing due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. National surveys tell us that when gay youth are in shelters, they are 10 times more likely than their straight peers to be sexually abused or to experience sexual misconduct by staff.ⁱⁱⁱ Transgender youth in particular are at risk when they are forced to use showers, bathrooms, and sleeping rooms corresponding to their sex assigned at birth. LGBT youth report that staff may force them to deny their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in order to receive appropriate services. This mistreatment can come from other youth seeking services as well as agency staff. In most cases, youth report resistance or unwillingness to seek shelter or services from any provider after being so harassed.

A plan to reduce LGBT youth homelessness in Connecticut will only be effective if paired with ongoing training and technical assistance for service providers. Therefore, we urge you to



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allocate additional funding to directly address LGBT youth homelessness. Such a plan should ensure that training is based on best practices for LGBT youth, training is provided to all agency staff that interact with LGBT homeless youth, and training evaluation mechanisms are incorporated. Moreover, the plan should place an emphasis on family acceptance as a protective factor to reduce LGBT youth homelessness and improve outcomes.^{iv} The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has created a resource guide to help practitioners incorporate family acceptance principles into programs.^v Finally, we recommend that the Commissioners' plan clarify that service providers may not discriminate against LGBT homeless youth based on Connecticut's existing non-discrimination protections applicable to public accommodations.^{vi}

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of this critical bill to protect LGBT youth. If you should have any questions regarding HRC's support for SB408, please contact me at 202-572-8960 or by email at Alison.Gill@hrc.org.

Sincerely,

Alison Gill, Esq.
Senior Legislative Counsel
Human Rights Campaign

ⁱ Durso, L.E., & Gates, G.J. (2012). *Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth who are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund. Available at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011. Available at http://transequality.org/PDFs/Executive_Summary.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Melissa Dunn and Jeff Krehely. *Supporting Gay and Transgender Youth Most in Need: White House Conference Turns Spotlight on Housing and Homelessness Issues Impacting Gay and Transgender Population*. 2012. Available at http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/03/pdf/lgbt_homelessness.pdf

^{iv} Caitlyn Ryan et al, "Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults," 123 PEDIATRICS 346 (2009). Available from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/1/346.full.pdf+html>

^v Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children*. HHS Publication No. PEP14-LGBTKIDS. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014. Available at <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>.

^{vi} Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 46a-64.