

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 26, 2015 Hearing on Human Services
By Lisa Tepper Bates, Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, 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 homeless youth in Connecticut.

We respectfully request that you support the budget proposal to maintain \$1 million annually for the housing stabilization and outreach to homeless youth. This funding is critically needed, and central to our state's ability to address the immediate safety needs of young people in Connecticut facing a housing crisis.

There are too many children and youth right now in Connecticut without a home, and without a safe place to go in times of crisis, living on the streets or moving from couch to couch, often under highly unsafe circumstances. Some are homeless with their families, as a result of poverty. Some have left home and are homeless on their own, with few supports.

These homeless youth are a hidden population, often not appearing to be homeless, attempting to fit in among their peers and not draw attention to themselves. Many fear DCF or foster care. They are often not connected to formal supports, either because they are unaware of resources or because they avoid the limited available services. Some 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 or unlocked cars as places of refuge, or live outside behind buildings or in parks. They have extremely limited options, with few dedicated shelter beds available to them – a total of only 13 statewide – and insufficient outreach services to find them and provide support.

Many homeless youth are fleeing abuse. They may have been rejected by their families and cannot return home. Often, they have been in and out of state programs, they may fear of DCF and the prospect of foster care. Or they may not be connected to formal supports, seeking to avoid them, or simply unaware of the limited available services.

The 2013 study, "Invisible No More: Creating Opportunities for Youth who are Homeless," conducted by The Consultation Center at Yale University, and co-sponsored by CCEH, documented both the lack of crisis supports for youth who are homelessness 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;
- 25% of the young people reported considering suicide over the last year;
- 7% had traded sex for money, 8% traded sex for a place to stay.

We know that the experience of homelessness for young people is traumatic, dangerous, damaging and costly. What we have not known previously is how many youth become homeless and must face this difficult path. Conventional methodologies for collecting data on this sub-population are ineffective because homeless youth are less accessible than their adult counterparts, difficult to track down, and often unwilling to talk to the adult volunteers who seek to engage them.

I am glad to report to you that we stand on the edge of a very important breakthrough with regard to grasping the scope of this important problem, and thereby being better prepared to solve it.

Working together with partners in the *Opening Doors-CT* process, CCEH has evaluated dozens of efforts around the country to count homeless youth. We have designed a state count of homeless youth based on the emerging best practices and lessons learned from other communities. Connecticut is the first state to engage in a statewide effort to count homeless youth. The counting process is completed, and we are working now to process the results. The count will provide – for the first time – reliable information to indicate the number of youth across Connecticut who experience homelessness, and equally important, to understand the patterns and characteristics of this population. Better data on youth homelessness will strengthen our ability as a state to understand the resources we need to address this issue, and how we can allocate those resources to have maximum positive impact.

The \$1 million commitment for homeless youth services is a critically important emergency resource while we are on our way to durable solutions to this problem. Effective outreach to connect with these vulnerable young people is of key importance to help them avoid the victimization and exploitation to which they may be subjected. Emergency options to protect their safety in the absence of sufficient shelter beds are critical. This funding allows for both. Thank you in advance for your support.

Respectfully,



Lisa Tepper Bates
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Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness