

Orlando Williams

Testimony Requesting Bill No 5553 be Amended to Help Homeless Students

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My name is Orlando Williams. I'm from Hartford. When I was just 10 years old my grandmother was abusing me a lot at home. I decided to runaway a lot and sleep on the street because I had nowhere else to go or nobody to go to. I used to run away and just walk for miles anywhere and in any weather. One time I walked in a bad snowstorm. It was cold and I was scared but I was also afraid of going home to the abuse. But every time I runaway, I was caught sleeping on the bench or just walking by the police because I was a child walking around in the middle of the night. Every time out of the multiple times I got caught by the police, they always took me right back home and I had to deal with even more abuse until finally the officers got tired of me running away and put me on probation. From probation, the judge decided to put me through Foster home lock down programs, all boy programs and hospitals to evaluate me and figure out the reason why kept running away. I never told them why I was running away so they kept moving me around place to place having me see a lot of doctors and psychiatrists. But I got past all of that eventually.

I'm 17 now. I still got my bit of problems but I want to do what's right. Based on the last statewide survey in 2015, there is an estimated 3000 teens across CT that are experiencing things similar to what I went through. Before I experienced all of this, I was a straight 'A' student. But the conflict and abuse at home and staying on the streets also affected how I did in school. My grades went down to straight F's and I was absent a lot of days skipping school having little to no help from teachers. When I told them my problems, the teachers reported me to the school social worker who then reported my situation to DCF and DCF would just send me to places I wouldn't want to go or places I've already been to.

I wish I could say that my experience is really uncommon, but I can't. Research consistently shows that one of the primary causes of youth homelessness is family conflict and abuse. Studies also show how much homelessness affects youth's ability to do well in school. They miss more school, get lower grades and are more likely to drop out. But, I totally understand - They have more important things on their minds than worrying about school.

I don't want other youth to have to experience what I did: To be cold and alone, to worry where they're going to lay their head for the night, to have no where to go to escape from the stress and tension at home, to not have someone to talk to. I almost lost my way, but I got lucky because I now have my mom and she's helping me.

I want you to make schools have better resources for homeless teens and for schools to provide a supportive and a safe environment. I also want schools to acknowledge and educate youths on their legal rights. Right now, there are not enough supports and services for homeless youth who are at trouble at school. And I feel that adding this issue to Bill No 5553 is important because there's so much good potential for youth to do well and realize their dreams. Help us not waste so much good potential.