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## Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

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In 2006, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs served 748,246 homeless youth, yet only seven percent of those unaccompanied homeless youth were provided shelter or transitional housing.

### **Background:**

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs are administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, in the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. RHYA programs include:

- The Basic Center Program provides grants to local community providers to meet the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families including emergency shelter, reunification when possible, food, clothing, counseling and facilitating access to health care.
- The Transitional Living Program supports projects that provide long-term residential services to homeless youth ages 16-21 for up to 18 months. This program provides services such as basic life skills, interpersonal skill building, educational advancement, job attainment skills, and physical and mental health care.
- The Education and Prevention Grants to Reduce Sexual Abuse of Runaway, Homeless and Street Youth (The Street Outreach Program) provides funds to private, nonprofit agencies for outreach efforts including treatment, counseling, education and referral to appropriate services.

Of the over 1 million homeless youth in America, just over 600,000 were served by the Runaway and Homeless Youth programs in 2004. Over 6,800 youth were turned away and denied shelter and housing and only one-third of homeless and runaway contacted through street outreach in 2004 had their needs met. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs served approximately 523,300 youth in 2005 and 740,000 youth in 2006, the vast majority with outreach contact only. A 2006 report on homeless youth by the Congressional Research Service noted "grantees serve only a fraction of the more than one million youth who run away or are homeless."

### **2008 RHYA Reauthorization:**

Representative John Yarmuth (D-KY) is expected to introduce a Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) reauthorization bill early in 2008. The Partnership to End Youth Homelessness has been working with his Congressional staff to include recommendations from homeless youth advocates. The following recommendations from the Alliance are influenced by research and interactions with our partners in the field.

Priority Recommendations for the RHY Act Reauthorization from the National Alliance to End Homelessness:

- 1. Reauthorize and increase authorization levels for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs: homeless youth consolidated account to be authorized at the \$200 million level in FY 2009 and ‘such sums as may be necessary’ in each of FY 2010 through FY 2013, and the runaway prevention account to be authorized at the \$30 million level in FY 2009 and ‘such sums as may be necessary’ in each of FY 2010 through FY 2013.**

Justification: As members of the National Partnership to End Youth Homelessness, we recommend an increase of authorization levels to allow for more communities to serve homeless youth and decrease the number of youth that are turned away each year due to lack of capacity or existence of an area provider. Of the over one million homeless youth in America, nearly 670,000 were served by the Runaway and Homeless Youth programs in 2004. However, most youth ‘served’ are not offered shelter or housing. Of the nearly 670,000 youth served through the runaway and homeless youth act programs, just 10% (a little over 60,000) received shelter or housing options. Over 6,800 youth were turned away and denied shelter and housing and only one-third of homeless and runaway contacted through street outreach in 2004 had their needs met.

- 2. Mandate that grantees demonstrate their ability to meet demonstrated needs in the community, including the needs of youth of color, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth, sexual minority youth, and other special populations with competent services and personnel orientation and training.**

Justification: A growing body of research over the past two decades has evinced a disproportional representation among homeless youth populations for African American, American Indian, youth with mental health disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Grants to community-based programs should only be awarded when the grantee has demonstrated their ability to meet demonstrated needs of particular cultural or categories of youth populations. This may require some programs to offer culturally-oriented services to youth of color, youth with disabilities, and sexual minority youth. It would also necessitate a showing on the part of the grantee that their program meets the needs of special populations and take steps to offer orientation and training.

- 3. Allow extension of up to 30 days for length of stay at BCP programs, when allowed by state law.**

Justification: The current statute allows for up to 14 days. The Basic Center Program should be focused on family reunification and a quick out-of-home shelter placement. However, some youth and families require intensive counseling and mediation that may extend beyond 30 days. To the extent allowed by State law, the BCP programs should allow for intervention and counseling services coupled with emergency shelter to be provided to any eligible youth up to 30 days.

4. **Call upon DHHS to complete two research projects focused on gathering data to help the country end youth homelessness:**
  - a. **Require DHHS to develop each fifth year, directly or via contract, a national estimate of the prevalence of unaccompanied situations and homelessness among youth and young adults;**
  - b. **Require DHHS to complete a comparative research study to determine the short and long term outcomes of residential stability, life skills mastery, educational advancement, employment, and connection to caring adults and community resources between the following housing models:**
    - i. **Emergency Rental Assistance (first month's rent and security deposit) coupled with case management services;**
    - ii. **Host Homes;**
    - iii. **Supervised Group Home;**
    - iv. **Scattered Site Transitional Housing;**
    - v. **Single-Site Transitional Housing with supportive services on-site;**
    - vi. **Single-Site Transitional Housing with supportive services off-site.**

Justification: HUD point-in-time homeless surveys lack methodologies to locate homeless youth, leading to significant under-counting of the population. Research indicating national prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness were last conducted in the 1990's. There are no current national incidence or prevalence findings which could offer insight into planning for housing production for unaccompanied homeless youth. Additionally, there is scant scientific or quasi-scientific comparative research available on the housing model interventions that produce efficient and positive outcomes for homeless youth. DHHS is conducting a current study of outcomes achieved through TLP but the study may offer little comparative data. Community planners and policy makers seek information on the most efficacious housing models for investment of limited public dollars. While multiple housing models exist across the nation, there is little research as to which structure of housing is better suited for positive outcomes for homeless youth. Ideally, a housing program would demonstrate positive outcomes across several domains, including residential stability, life skills mastery, educational advancement, employment and connection to caring adults and the broader community.

5. **Require DHHS to develop performance standards for RHYA direct service grantees and provide an opportunity for public comment on the performance standards.**

Justification: The recommendation is made in partnership with the National Network for Youth, would allow for improved services and outcomes by giving RHYA direct service grantees accurate and current information about the best practices for providing competent services to homeless youth based on the knowledge and practical experience of experts in the field. It is necessary for the public to be allowed to comment on the performance standards to solicit feedback and encourage consensus on professional practices to govern services from direct homeless youth service providers and administrators.

6. **Require DHHS to develop a process for considering appeals for reconsideration from unsuccessful RHYA applicants and ensure that 'such sums as may be sufficient' will**

**be placed in a reserve fund to utilize for reversals in funding denials to local community organizations.**

Justification: The Alliance has heard from several organizations denied funding for reasons that appear not to be justified in the grant review process. The public and nonprofit agencies seek transparency into whether and how reconsiderations are granted. The lack of a formal appeal process impedes such transparency. If a review and appeal process is created for applicants denied funding, there is potential that some denied applicants will either be restored or granted new funding. DHHS and the Administration for Children and Families should be instructed to set aside an appeal reserve fund, of such sums as may be sufficient, to adequately address pending appeals. This would allow for the flexibility to restore funding when warranted after a review and appeal process.

**7. Increase the age of eligibility to 24 years for TLP and through age 18 for the BCP when not in conflict with state law.**

Justification: Scientific research indicates that adolescent brain development is not complete until age 25. Access to stable housing tied to services complimenting youth development and career goals should not be artificially restricted to age 21 but be benchmarked to the end phase of a youth's brain development. Culturally, many households are seeing young adult children remain in their parental homes. Up to 20% America's 26 year olds are living with their parents. Homeless youth who cannot return home should be afforded access to federally funded TLP programs from age 16 through 24.