

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 292

### AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS YOUTH

March 2, 2010

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and the Director of the Center's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state. In addition, I am the chair of the Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth,<sup>1</sup> a statewide group of professionals interested in improving access to services and supports for runaway and homeless youth in the state of Connecticut. The Team is comprised of state agencies such as the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Court Support Services Division, and the State Department of Education, as well as private providers throughout the state including The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, RYASAP, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, True Colors, Kids in Crisis, the Village for Families and Children as well as others.



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#### **I write today to urge you to support Raised Bill No. 292, "An Act Concerning Homeless Youth."**

The Center is supporting this bill because we believe it will improve Connecticut's ability to provide supports and services to an *invisible* population. We also believe this bill will bring much-needed attention to the needs of homeless youth in this state. The bill seeks to provide a lead state agency, CT Department of Children and Families, to coordinate existing services for this population and report to the legislature about the efficacy of the programs.

Why do we call homeless youth "the invisible population"? This is because there is very little known about these kids in Connecticut. They are invisible because:

- there is little data on this population
- there are few services for this population
- there is little coordination between a multitude of systems and agencies serving this population
- there is little awareness of this population in Connecticut

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<sup>1</sup> The Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth was convened in the summer of 2008 in response to a request by the American Bar Association's Committee on Homelessness and Poverty as well as the National Network for Youth that each state bring together advocates to affect systemic change on behalf of runaway and homeless youth.

Who are Connecticut's homeless youth? They are youth who come into the care of the DCF due to abuse or neglect and then runaway from DCF care. They are also youth who *refuse* services from DCF. They are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth who have been kicked out of their homes after "coming out", adolescent boys who are not allowed into family homeless shelters, and youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth states that parental abuse and neglect is a primary cause of homelessness among unaccompanied youth (homeless youth who are on their own).<sup>2</sup> The National Network for Youth estimates that according to studies of a homeless youth sample, 33% had been in foster care, 51% had been physically abused, and 60% of girls and 23% of boys had been sexually abused.<sup>3</sup>

In Connecticut, *we do not have an accurate number of runaway and homeless youth*. We know that the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), a database maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, reported on October 20, 2008 that there were 236 active runaway cases and 4,300 purged records for runaway cases in Connecticut for 2008. (Please see attached data sheet.) We also know that the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management and Information System reported a total of 269 runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut for fiscal year 2008/09.<sup>4</sup> A report from the Office of Legislative Research indicates that though the number is difficult to precisely count, there are more than 350 unaccompanied homeless children under the age of 18 in Connecticut.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the actual number of homeless youth, we know from our work in updating the data from last year that the *numbers of homeless youth have increased in all categories*- from the national reporting agencies to Connecticut's state agencies. To wit, the number of runaway incidents of children/youth in DCF care increased in by 207 from 2008 to 2009.

For this reason, we respectfully ask the committee to consider one change to the bill. **The bill should include a section on reporting the number of homeless youth in the state.** Section 2 currently requires a report to the legislature evaluating the program established under Section 1. Instead, we would suggest that the bill require the department to count the number of homeless youth by February 1, 2011. Time is of the essence.

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<sup>2</sup> "Using What We Know: Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth." 39, Julianelle, Patricia, The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, February 2008, available at [http://www.naehcy.org/dl/uwvk\\_youth.pdf](http://www.naehcy.org/dl/uwvk_youth.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> "Unaccompanied Youth: Fast Facts" National Network for Youth, citing YouthCare, Inc., 1998, available at [http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet\\_Unacompanied\\_Youth.pdf](http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet_Unacompanied_Youth.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> This number is believed to be a far underestimate of the total number of homeless youth in CT as it only includes reports from grantees of a national grant to work with runaway and homeless youth.

<sup>5</sup> "Poverty, Homelessness, and Children." CT Office of Legislative Research (July 7, 2008).

**This bill also dovetails nicely with Raised Bill No. 5360 Sec 4, An Act Concerning Children in the Recession.** Both seek to address this vulnerable population.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Attorney Stacey Violante Cote

Director, Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic

Chair, CT Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth

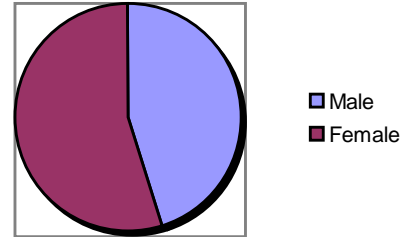
# How many runaway and homeless children and youth are in Connecticut? We still don't know!

What *DO* we know?

## National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)

**CT 08/09 Fiscal Year Total: 269**

Male: 121  
 Female: 148  
 <12 years: 32  
 12-14 years: 111  
 15-16 years: 93  
 17-18 years: 33

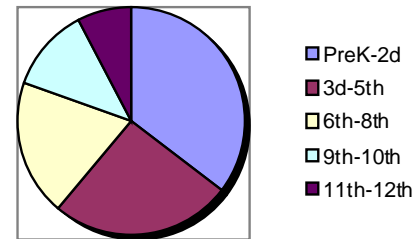
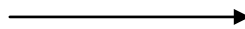


## CT Department of Education

Homeless children/youths enrolled in public school

**2008-09 School Year Total: 2387**

Pre-k – 2d grade: 845  
 Grades 3-5: 611  
 Grades 6-8: 462  
 Grades 9-10: 281  
 Grades 11-12: 187

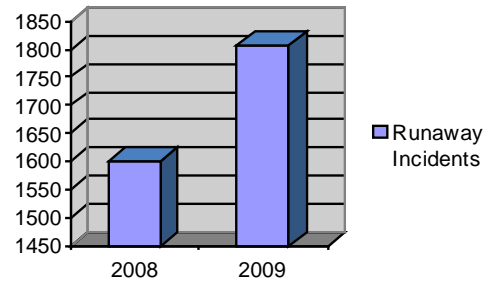


## CT Department of Children and Families

Runaway incidents of children/youth in DCF care

**2009 Total: 1,807**

2008 Total: 1,600



## CT Court Support Services Division

Runaways (unique clients):

FWSN 10/1/07 – 9/30/08: 240

YIC 1/1/08 – 11/15/08: 147

## National Crime Information Center (NCIC)

Active runaway cases on 10/20/08: 236

Purged runaway records for 2008: 4,300