

Recommendations to Congress on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

Summary Recommendation: The Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs are essential to prevent exploitation of youth on the streets and to support reconnection to their families, schools, employment, and housing options.

America's homeless youth are denied services because communities lack outreach, shelter, and housing programs. In 2009, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs made over 800,000 street outreach contacts with homeless and at-risk youth, of which, less than 41,000 received access to a shelter bed and less than 4,000 received access to housing. Congress could offer necessary, crisis services for homeless youth by appropriating **\$165 million in fiscal year (FY) 2011 for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs.**

Total Program Funding: Five Year Progress

YEAR	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010
Transitional Living	\$37	\$36	\$40	\$43	\$44	\$44
Basic Centers	\$45	\$44	\$48	\$53	\$53	\$54
Street Outreach	\$14	\$14	\$15	\$17	\$18	\$18
Total (approximate in millions)	\$105*	\$104*	\$103*	\$113	\$115	\$116

* Includes a one percent spending cut.

Homelessness among American Youth is Widespread

The best studies available indicate that over 1 million youth are homeless each year in America. One national study in 1998 reviewed the 1992 National Health Interview Survey and determined that five percent of the youth population (more than 1.5 million) experienced homelessness each year. Street outreach programs made over 740,000 contacts to youth in 2008.

Causes of Youth Homelessness

Many youth report severe family conflict as a primary reason for becoming homeless. Volatile conditions within a family create an environment where the youth may experience physical violence, sexual abuse, chronic neglect, or abandonment, typically related to chemical dependency or mental health issues. Across studies of homeless youth, sexual abuse experiences range from 17 to 53 percent and physical abuse ranges

from 40 to 60 percent. Youth may also become homeless when their families throw them out due to pregnancy, drug or alcohol use, sexual orientation, or school problems.

Youth homelessness also reflects the deficits in public systems of care such as child welfare, juvenile corrections, and child mental health systems. Many teenagers are turned away from child protection services with responses that their complaints of abuse or neglect do not warrant intervention or foster care services. At the end of 2008, over 3,000 children had fled a foster care placement and were not recovered. Each year, approximately 29,500 youth age out of foster care and 100,000 youth leave the juvenile justice system with little or no financial and housing resources. As a result, many experience episodic homelessness. More attention is required to address the housing needs of youth leaving public systems of care.

Homeless Youth Are Turned Away

Of the over 1 million homeless youth in America, in 2009, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act federally funded programs served less than 41,000 with shelter services and less than 4,000 received transitional housing. Over 7,500 youth were turned away and denied shelter and housing. 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.” Communities have the desire to serve homeless youth but often lack the necessary options of outreach, drop-in centers, shelters, and housing to intervene. Once homeless, many youth face survival on the streets, recruitment by gangs, exposure to drugs, and sexual exploitation by adults.

Homeless Youth Programs Are Cost Effective

Homeless youth programs are cost effective alternatives to more expensive out-of-home placements like treatment facilities, group homes, foster care, juvenile corrections, custodial care, treatment, and/or arrests. Additionally, the U.S. Office on Management and Budget’s Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process found that, in 2006, the Runaway and Homeless Youth programs were “effective” because they made improvements to their evaluation of youth outcomes and had ambitious targets for program measures.

Congressional Action Request

The National Partnership to End Youth Homelessness encourages members of Congress to appropriate \$165 million to this vital program to meet the crisis needs of America’s homeless youth. This recommendation would serve approximately 18,000 additional homeless youth with shelter and housing services and provide for over 300,000 additional street outreach contacts and crisis intervention, and potentially alleviate future public expenditures for this population of vulnerable youth.

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