

FY 2014 Appropriations: Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Federal Policy Update, July 2013

Program Overview

Although data on the extent of youth homelessness is limited, past studies have estimated that there are approximately 1.68 million runaway or homeless youth under the age of 18 each year in the United States.¹ Approximately 400,000 of these children remain outside their home for over a week, and 125,000 are homeless for over a month. Additionally, about 150,000 single young adults ages 18 to 24 are homeless over the course of a year, along with many young women with children. However, only approximately 50,000 youth per year are served by targeted homeless youth programs. A variety of assistance is needed for youth who are away from their homes for a significant period of time.

Youth become homeless for a variety of reasons, but the most common cause given is severe family conflict, including physical violence, sexual abuse, chronic neglect, or abandonment. Youth also become homeless when their families force them to leave due to pregnancy, drug or alcohol use, non-acceptance of sexual orientation or gender identity, or to reduce family size due to a lack of resources.

Youth homelessness also reflects the deficits in public systems of care such as the child welfare, juvenile justice, and child mental health systems. Last year, nearly 20,000 youth emancipated from foster care,² and approximately 100,000 youth leave the juvenile justice system each year with little or no financial or housing resources.³ Homeless youth and young adults are at great risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, substance dependency, and death. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that public systems of care are held responsible for preventing youth from becoming homeless upon exit from their purview.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs provide youth with a stable foundation from which they can connect with services, rejoin their families, or develop the skills needed to live independently. RHYA grantees help youth to set and achieve education and employment goals.

RHYA programs work to address the needs of homeless youth. Unfortunately, there are limited resources to help youth reconnect with family or another caring adult, obtain safe emergency housing, or access longer-term assistance for housing and support services. In fiscal year (FY) 2011, more than 8,000 youth were turned away from Transitional Living Programs,⁴ which are projects that provide long-term residential services to homeless youth for 18 months.

The 2008 reauthorization of RHYA programs required a study on the incidence and prevalence of youth homelessness that has not yet been conducted. Without national data on the extent of youth homelessness, it is impossible to bring interventions to the scale needed to solve youth homelessness.

However, even with limited data, RHYA programs are becoming more efficient in using the programs' limited capacities to better serve youth. They are doing so by implementing new strategies and promising practices to reach and serve as many youth as possible to protect them from having to sleep on the streets. In FY 2011, the RHYA street outreach program made over 693,000 contacts with homeless youth.⁵ In 2010, Transitional Living Programs exceeded the federal target for safe program exits, and Basic Center Programs exceeded the federal target for proportion of youth prevented from running away as a result of receiving preventive services.⁶

Current Status

Following sequestration, the programs will receive a total of \$110 million in FY 2013. The President's Budget Proposal for FY 2014 recommends returning those funds to the program and providing \$115 million for RHYA programs in FY 2014 as well as an additional \$3 million for an incidence and prevalence study.

Recommendation

Congress should provide at least \$128 million in funding for RHYA programs in FY 2014 to support existing programs and help communities better meet the needs of homeless and runaway youth. Congress should also fund an incidence and prevalence study of homeless youth, as requested by the President in his Budget Proposal.

1 National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children, 2002.

2 The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Report, 2012.

3 The National Reentry Resource Center. <http://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/announcements/five-emerging-practices-in-juvenile-reentry>

4 National RHYA Program Utilization. http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/4500_file_RHYA_Program_Utilization.pdf

5 Ibid

6 Detailed Information on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Assessment, 2006. www.houtehouse.gov/expectmore/detail/100001064.2006.html

Funding for Homeless Youth: Congressional Talking Points

July 2013

FY 2014 "Ask"	Pres. FY 2014 Request	Senate FY 2014 Level	House FY 2014 Level	FY 2013 Level
\$128 million	\$115 million	Not available.	Not available.	\$110 million

Providing \$128 million for RHYA programs in FY 2014 would allow communities to continue existing RHYA programs and better meet the housing and services needs of homeless and runaway youth.

Talking Points:

- **Need.** Researchers estimate that there are approximately 1.6 million runaway or homeless youth under 18 each year. Approximately 400,000 of these children remain outside their home for over a week and 125,000 are homeless for over a month. Additionally, an estimated 150,000 single young adults ages 18 to 24 are homeless each year. RHYA (Runaway and Homeless Youth Act) programs have been chronically underfunded, and resources to serve this population are greatly needed. Currently, only approximately 50,000 youth per year are served by targeted homeless youth programs. Every year, thousands of youth who seek shelter are turned away.
 - *Describe the homeless youth population in your community and how the scope of youth homelessness compares to the need for increased resources to address this problem.*
- **Government Responsibility.** Homeless youth and young adults are at great risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, substance dependency, and death. The federal government has a responsibility to increase the nation's capacity to serve and protect youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness by investing in programs focusing on proven strategies, conducting research and analysis on the prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness, and ensuring that the Child Welfare system is held accountable for youth that may fall under its purview.
 - *Point out the Administration's goal to end youth homelessness by 2020.*
 - *Explain that current data on the incidence and prevalence of youth homelessness is inadequate.*
 - *Explain that the Child Welfare system should provide the after-care support that youth aging out of foster care often need in order to successfully transition to independence.*
 - *Explain that the Child Welfare system should also increase its responsibility for youth under 18 (or other age, dependent upon state regulations) that are still engaged in the system.*
- **Efficient.** Homeless youth programs are becoming increasingly more efficient at using their limited capacities to better serve youth. Providers are using new strategies to reach as many youth as possible with available resources and to protect youth from having to sleep in unsafe environments.
 - *Discuss how your community maximizes limited resources to effectively serve as many youth as possible.*
 - *Explain any innovative strategies your community is using to serve homeless youth, and discuss the number of children/youth served locally. Share any outcomes data you may have from local programs serving homeless youth and emphasize the effectiveness of these programs.*
- **Stable Foundation.** Homeless youth programs provide youth with a stable foundation from which they can reunify with their families or develop skills to live independently. They aim to help youth increase economic independence through educational attainment and employment/career advancement.
 - *Discuss your community's efforts to connect homeless youth with necessary educational and employment resources. Share any outcomes data you may have.*
- **I hope you will work with your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to provide \$128 million for HHS' Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs in the final FY 2014 appropriations bill.**