

One Voice Texas

A Collaborative for Health & Human Services



Children & Youth Services: Increase Opportunities to Serve Homeless Youth

Issue/Concern:

Homeless youth in the state of Texas are vulnerable to human trafficking and other negative outcomes associated with not having a safe and stable environment where they can reside. These youth are not always literally homeless, but do not have a permanent residence often moving from place to place in search of stability. The inconsistency that plagues these young people is often a result of abuse or neglect in their home environment that leads them to run or forces them on to the streets when their parents/guardians kick them out. Although reunification is desirable it is not always possible to return home and some youth must be responsible for their own affairs. By changing certain provisions in the Family Code, the state of Texas can recognize the harsh circumstances that drive youth onto the streets and establish tools that youth and service providers can use to better serve this population.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- Establish a state definition of homeless youth.
- Allow youth who meet the Family Code criteria for consent to medical treatment and emergency shelters, to contract for permanent supportive housing or transitional living arrangements; add a licensing requirement that allows licensed facilities to house youth who meet consent criteria, without the consent of a parent or guardian.
- Establish a "with cause" provision under the non-offender designation for children who run away from home due to abuse, neglect, or forced to leave home without appropriate provisions for shelter.
- Add the designation of Family in Need of Services (FINS) to the options juvenile court judges can use to intervene with children and their families.

Supporting Facts/Research Resources:

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. 2012. *Alone without a home: A state-by-state review of laws affecting unaccompanied youth.* Available at:

<http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/Alone%20Without%20A%20Home1.pdf>

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