



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify today on the implementation and reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

I am Carol Behrer, Associate Commissioner of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), which directly oversees the implementation of this Act. The Bureau is located within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), which is now part of the recently-created Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services. The ACF was created in April 1991 to provide a greater focus and emphasis on the needs of America's children and families, to allow for close coordination among programs, and ultimately to improve services for vulnerable children, youth and families. We have applied these same goals to the administration of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is at the core of ACF programs for youth. As such, it is a critical component of the myriad of programs administered by ACF that target children, youth and their families. I am therefore very pleased to have this opportunity to outline the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the Act and to consolidate Federal programs for runaway and homeless youth.

Under current law, three separate programs target the runaway and homeless youth population. These programs are the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program and the Transitional Living Program for Homeless Youth, authorized under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1974, as amended, and the Drug Abuse Prevention Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth, authorized under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, as amended. Together, these programs represent \$63 million in Federal funding, which is distributed among nearly 400 State or local, public or private agencies across the country to provide services to runaway and homeless youth.

#### Comprehensive Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Proposal

The Administration's reauthorization proposal would establish a single program to provide comprehensive services at the local level for runaway and homeless youth, replacing the three separate program authorities now in existence. As reflected in the President's Budget for FY 1993, the Administration will propose an authorization level of \$63 million for this new consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. This authorization combines the current level of funding for the three programs, and does not in any way diminish the Administration's commitment to these services.

Funds available for these comprehensive service grants will be

allotted among the States using the current Runaway and Homeless Youth Act allocation formula, which is based on State youth population. Competitive grants would be awarded directly to service providers for the purpose of establishing and operating local runaway and homeless youth centers to meet the emergency and transitional living needs, including drug abuse prevention and intervention, of the target population. The Administration's proposal will maintain the provision of current law that gives priority for such grants to agencies with experience in providing services to runaway and homeless youth.

We believe that there are several advantages to this consolidated approach. First, it will allow for more comprehensive services to be provided at the service delivery level. There is increasing consensus among researchers and service providers that youth problems are interrelated and stem from similar risk factors. Unfortunately, small categorical grant programs make it difficult for local agencies to provide the comprehensive services that are needed to effectively address these problems. Fragmented funding sources often result in fragmented services. Our proposal will help alleviate this fragmentation and move us toward the goal of providing a continuum of care for the runaway and homeless youth population.

Second, the consolidated approach will allow greater flexibility at the local level, allowing individual agencies serving runaway and homeless youth to identify the most immediate needs within their communities and to have greater control over the resources to meet those needs. For example, a community may have sufficient resources to meet the emergency, crisis intervention needs of homeless youth, but lack resources to address their longer-term needs. Because funds under the current Transitional Living Program are limited, however, many communities have not been able to access Federal funds to support their need for these long-term services. Under the Administration's proposal, communities will have a better opportunity to direct Federal financial resources to meet their most pressing needs and build a continuum of care for runaway and homeless youth.

Third, the disproportionately high rates of alcohol and drug use among the runaway and homeless youth population supports the need to incorporate drug prevention and intervention activities as an integral part of all projects serving this population. The President's 1992 National Drug Control Strategy highlights the total resources available to serve this population because of the high proportion of runaway and homeless youth involved in the use of drugs and alcohol. Among the most successful grants under the Drug Abuse Prevention Program, for example, are those that utilize this funding to establish and enhance alcohol and other drug use prevention activities as part of their overall service

delivery system. Specific activities often include the following:

- o developing and using screening and assessment tools and procedures upon in-take at emergency shelters or transitional living projects;
- o providing drug education, awareness, and assessment training to staff and volunteers of a runaway and homeless youth program;
- o identifying drug treatment resources accessible to runaway youth and their families;
- o developing and formalizing program policy and procedures relative to drug involved youth; and
- o incorporating drug and alcohol information into client records and evaluation processes.

By including the Drug Abuse Prevention Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth in the consolidation proposal, we can ensure that more agencies serving this population are incorporating such activities as part of their ongoing programs.

Fourth, under the current arrangement of three separate, discretionary programs, individual agencies must devote

considerable resources toward competing for, administering, and reporting on Federal grants. Currently, a typical agency serving runaway and homeless youth will have a dozen or more funding sources. By consolidating at least the Federal funding sources for runaway and homeless youth services, we can significantly reduce the burdens associated with applying for and administering these Federal grants.

Currently, because of the identical target population of the three programs and the statutory priority for funding given to agencies with experience serving runaway and homeless youth, there is substantial overlap among the grantees in the three programs proposed for consolidation. For example, approximately 80 percent of the agencies receiving Drug Abuse Prevention Program grants, also receive funding under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. Of the existing 77 Transitional Living Program grantees, 54 also are Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grantees.

Under the three separate program authorities, FYSB now awards and manages approximately 575 service grants each year. However, these grants are awarded to about 400 different agencies. Most of these agencies (369) are funded under the largest and most established Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, and many receive funding under at least one of the other two programs targeting runaway and homeless youth. Of the agencies we support, 23

receive grants under all three of the runaway and homeless youth programs we are proposing to consolidate.

#### National Activities

In addition, the Administration's reauthorization and consolidation proposal will include authority for a variety of national activities that are currently part of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. These authorities will include the national communications system (runaway hotline), training and technical assistance support for the runaway and homeless youth service field, and research, demonstration and evaluation initiatives. Let me briefly describe our efforts in these areas.

#### National Communications System

The National Communication System (NCS) is a toll-free, 24 hour a day information, referral, and crisis counseling service for runaway and homeless youth and their families. This system was initiated in FY 1974 as an eight month demonstration grant for the purpose of providing toll-free telephone services to runaway youth. In the eight month period, over 11,000 calls were received.

Today, the National Communications System is an important component of the alternative youth service system, providing counseling and referrals to about 10,000 callers a month. The



current grant to operate this system was awarded to the National Runaway Switchboard, formerly Metro-Help, in Chicago in April 1991. Funding for this grant will be \$750,000 in FY 1992, as mandated by the Act. We have been very impressed with the services provided by the National Runaway Switchboard and will be including continued authority for this activity in the Administration's reauthorization bill.

#### Training and Technical Assistance

The dramatic increase in the number of Federally-funded runaway and homeless youth projects over the last three years (from 320 grants awarded in FY 1988 to over 575 awarded in FY 1991), has increased the need for resources to support the ongoing improvement of this service system. Moreover, the nature of the service delivery system has become more complex as additional needs of the runaway and homeless youth population have been identified and as the services being provided have become more sophisticated.

The Family and Youth Services Bureau has, therefore, emphasized a number of activities to support the runaway and homeless youth field and to improve services to this population. Central to these activities is a regionally-based system of ten grantees that provide training and technical assistance to runaway and homeless youth projects.

These grantees are jointly funded under all three discretionary programs, each of which authorizes these activities, in order to coordinate these support activities among the three programs. By combining these resources, we believe that more effective, and unduplicated support services will be available to the youth-serving community. In FY 1992, we anticipate devoting approximately \$1.3 million to training and technical assistance under the runaway and homeless youth programs.

The training and technical assistance grantees assess and document needs, facilitate the sharing of information and resources, and provide, directly or indirectly, consultation and assistance to youth-serving agencies. These training and technical assistance providers are also a valuable mechanism to communicate issues and information to and from the Family and Youth Services Bureau and the youth-serving community.

#### Management Information System

The growth of Federal programs targeting runaway and homeless youth in recent years has also created new demands for ongoing, reliable information. In response to these demands, FYSB is developing a Management Information System (MIS) for projects currently funded under the three separate authorities and which we will apply to the consolidated program, if authorized. This data collection effort will ensure that consistent, reliable information is available on the projects receiving Federal

support, the characteristics of youth receiving services from these projects, and the services being delivered. Data collection utilizing the MIS should begin later this year and be fully implemented in FY 1993.

As envisioned, the MIS will be a fully automated system that will provide valuable information both to individual projects, for local planning and programming purposes, and to the Federal government for national analysis and policy development. The MIS will also provide a solid data base which can be accessed for future research and evaluation projects and ongoing program development activities.

#### Research and Evaluation

Further, as the number of Federally-funded projects serving runaway and homeless youth has increased and as the service delivery system has become more complex, the need for systematic evaluation of these programs has risen. The Family and Youth Services Bureau is, therefore, pursuing an extensive research and evaluation agenda related to programs serving the runaway and homeless youth population.

A number of projects to identify the nature and extent of the problems confronting runaway and homeless youth and to determine the effectiveness of Federal programs targeted to this population are currently underway. These projects include evaluations of

the Runaway and Homeless Youth Basic Center program and the Transitional Living Program, and a national study of the incidence and characteristics of runaway and homeless youth. The results of these efforts will provide the basis for development of improved program services and for informed policy making well into the future.

#### Coordination Activities

Finally, I would like to briefly mention our efforts to coordinate the runaway and homeless youth programs with other Federal programs and services. For example, we are working closely with the Bureau of Health Care Delivery and Assistance of the Public Health Service, which administers the Health Care for the Homeless Program, in order to increase access to health care by runaway and homeless youth. We are also pursuing joint activities with the National Institute of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of the Centers for Disease Control to improve HIV prevention among high-risk youth, including runaway and street youth.

In addition, mental health needs of runaway and homeless youth are tremendous, and we are, therefore, working with the National Institute of Mental Health to identify ways to increase access to these services. In each of these cases, we are attempting to better utilize and coordinate existing resources to improve services to high-risk youth.

In closing, I would like to state that I look forward to working with you on the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. I urge the Subcommittee to favorably consider the Administration's legislative proposal which we believe will help improve the delivery of services to this most vulnerable population. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions.