



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, FAMILY AND
YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU**

ISSUE: MANDATE FEDERAL AGENCIES IMPLEMENTING THE RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH ACT TO (1) PROVIDE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SOCIAL SERVICES AND SAFER HOUSING OPTIONS FOR RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) YOUTH BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16-24, (2) DEVELOP SURVEY METHODOLOGIES THAT MEASURES THE UNIVERSE OF LGBT HOMELESS YOUTH AND GAUGE THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS AND (3) RESEARCH THE EFFICACY OF VARIOUS HOUSING MODELS AND PROGRAMS AIMED AT REDUCING THE RATE OF LGBT HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY YOUTH TO DETERMINE THE BEST APPROACH IN DEVELOPING A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LONG-TERM STRATEGY.

POLICY DESCRIPTION:

- A. This policy profile addresses policies impacting LGBT runaway and homeless youth.
- B. The existing policy does not account for the specific housing and social service needs of LGBT Runaway and homeless youth.

Goal: To allow LGBT youth equitable access to emergency and transitional shelter facilities in federally funded runaway and homeless youth facilities along with providing culturally competent programs that address the specific needs of this community.

Current Law: The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701, Section 302): Current law acknowledges that youth who have become homeless or who leave and remain away from home without parental permission, are at risk of developing, and have a disproportionate share of, serious health, behavioral, and emotional problems because they lack sufficient resources to obtain care and may live on the street for extended periods thereby endangering themselves.

Thus, the law calls for: Shelter and Services. The law calls for temporary shelter and services, including services that are linguistically appropriate. These services fail to recognize the specific needs of LGBT youth and do not require culturally competent services. National Reporting System. Since this problem is of the interstate nature, it is the Responsibility of the federal government to



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develop an accurate national reporting system to account for the problem and to assist in the development of an effective system of care (including preventative and aftercare services) outside of the welfare system and the law enforcement system. This reporting system does not account for LGBT youth. Long-term Strategy. Requires a long-term strategy for responding to the needs of this population through improved coordination and collaboration between the federal and state programs that serve runaway and homeless youth. It does not define what these needs are.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Federal and State Agencies that implement the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) should incorporate the following recommendations in the upcoming reauthorization bill (expected later this fall or early next year) and/or create administrative regulations to clarify the following points:

Provide Safer Housing and Culturally Competent Services. The 2008 reauthorization bill or an administrative regulatory change should mandate federal, state, and community based organizations demonstrate their ability to meet the specific needs runaway and homeless youth, including the needs of youth of color, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth with competent services and personnel orientation and training.

Develop National Reporting System Inclusive of LGBT Youth. The Health and Human Services Administration should adopt point-in-time homeless surveys (similar to HUD's that focuses on adult populations) that include methodologies to locate homeless youth, leading to a more accurate accounting of the population . Furthermore, the existing survey should account for LGBT youth, making it possible to determine the full universe and specific needs of this underserved population. Finally, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System, as administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services should include demographic data collection on the number of LGBT youth entering and exiting shelter and transitional housing programs and the outcomes achieved with LGBT youth participants.

Create a Long-term Strategy Inclusive of LGBT Youth. Develop a long-term strategy that examines multiple housing models across the nation to determine which programmatic service models coupled with rental assistance in existing youth housing models are better suited for positive outcomes for homeless youth, making a concerted effort to determine what works best for youth of color, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting



youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

A. Language Recommendation

Underlined below are several language suggestions that should be adopted to 42 U.S.C. 5701 - The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, Section 302 in either the upcoming RHYA Reauthorization Bill or through modifications to administrative regulations and policy:

- 1) many such young people, because of their age and situation, are urgently in need of temporary shelter and services including services that are:
 - a) culturally competent for youth of color, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities and pregnant and parenting youth
 - b) linguistically appropriate
 - c) acknowledge the environment of youth seeking these services.
- 2) in view of the interstate nature of the problem, it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to develop an accurate national reporting system to report the problem, and to assist in the development of an effective system of care (including preventive and aftercare services, emergency shelter services, extended residential shelter, and street outreach services) outside the welfare system and the law enforcement system. The national reporting system shall include methodologies to account for youth of color, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth and other special populations;
- 3) improved coordination and collaboration between the Federal programs that serve runaway and homeless youth are necessary for the development of a long-term strategy for responding to the needs of this population. The long-term strategy must evaluate the efficacy of existing housing programs examining how each model addressed the needs of all runaway and homeless youth inclusive of youth of color, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth and other special populations.

B. Specific Outcomes

If the following language has adopted three specific outcomes that will ensure improved shelter safety and efficacy:

- 1) Meeting the needs of LGBT homeless and runaway youth will not only improve the safety of these young people, but it will also improve the efficacy of the housing programs by addressing



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the specific needs of this particular population.

- 2) Informed understanding of needs by incorporating survey methodologies that account for LGBT runaway and homeless youth will help researchers and analysts better understand the size of this community, which will help in developing culturally competent programs.
- 3) Enhanced coordination to reduce homelessness - Research determining the most effective housing models and programs that meet the needs of LGBT runaway and homeless youth will better facilitate the implementation of a more comprehensive long-term strategy that considers the specific needs of certain populations of runaway and homeless youth.

IMPLEMENTATION:

A. Administering Agency - Family and Youth Services Bureau, in the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families

B. Authority to Change Policy - According to section 303 of the RHYA, the "Secretary of Health and Human Services may issue such rules as the Secretary considers necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of this title." None of the recommendations require a legislative initiative, though there is the opportunity of working with the Congress during the reauthorization of this bill to include the recommended language (the 2008 Reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act was introduced before the Labor Day recess in the House but no further action has been taken at this point as of September 15th, 2008).