



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

### ISSUE: RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS LGBTQ YOUTH

**POLICY DESCRIPTION:** Runaway, throwaway and homeless (RHY) gay, lesbian, biattractational, transgender and questioning youth, ages 12-24 and the lack of funding for LGBT specific agencies and certifications of mainstream agencies who receive federal funding to serve this population.

40% of the 1.6 million homeless youth will self identify as LGBT. However, there are only three youth social service agencies in the country that work specifically with this population, leaving a huge gap in services for LGBT RHY youth. Under the Runaway and Homeless Youth ACT of 1980, funds have been allocated to provide three service components: Street Outreach, Basic Centers, and Transitional Living Programs. In past years, agencies with LGBT youth missions found it difficult to access these funds. One agency was told that they were creating barriers for non-LGBT youth by creating a program for them when denied funding.

RHY agency requirements from the Department of Health and Human Services do not require any grantee to have any level of competence in working with LGBT youth. With these youth representing 40% of the RHY population, most agencies just ignore the special needs of the LGBT population. Just in Michigan, an agency made LGBT youth wear orange jumpsuits while another agency puts LGBT youth in their own rooms for their “own protection”, outing them in the process.

**Goal:** To allow equal access to LGBT specific agencies to funding without discrimination.

**Current law:** No protections or appeal process for the LGBT agencies and no training to federal grant peer grant reviewers on the issues of LGBT youth.

The current RHY funding from HHS has no minimum or maximum certification or training requirements for agencies receiving federal RHY grants. In addition, the federal grant peer reviewers are not given any special training on LGBT RHY, creating an uneven playing field for those agencies that carry expertise in this over represented population. At least one LGBT specific youth agency has an executive director with 13 years of experience in federal grant



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writing and had never lost an HHS RHY grant until working for an LGBT specific agency. Without the needed federal RHY funds, these youth are underserved and the agencies under resourced unfairly.

After receiving their first SOP grant, Ruth Ellis Center has been unable to get this grant again for the last three years. After one cycle of Basic Center funding, that grant was also not awarded again. We could attribute this to poor grant writing, but HHS sends out reviewer comments. In these two cases, those comment were viewed as being unfair and discriminatory. This agency took matters into its own hands and asked our legislators for a federal earmark to help replace some of the funding. Senator Carl Levin agreed with Ruth Ellis Center and fought to get them a federal earmark awarded on 9/8/08

**RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:** HHS should require of all grantees a certification in working with LGBT youth since they are almost half of the RHY population. There should be minimum training standards that must be met before any federal money is awarded. LGBT RHY will have equal access to services all over the country and not be abused by the systems designed to help them.

**THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE RECOMMENDATION CAN BE IMPLEMENTED:**

Health and Human Service, Administration for Children and Families and the Family Youth Services Bureau is responsible for this policy. If the policy is enacted, the persons responsible for accountability are the federal FYSB contract representatives assigned to each region for federal compliance. The head of HHS-Mike Leavitt-Secretary of Health and Human Services, US Department of Health and Human Services has the authority to change the policy.

**GRANT AND CONTRACT REVIEW COMMITTEES:** Through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1980, three programs are funded: Transitional Living Program, Basic Center (emergency shelter and Street Outreach. With a level playing field, applicants seeking to serve LGBT youth will gain better access to these funds. LGBT youth social service agencies must have a level playing field to be able to access these funds. If mainstream agencies are required to have a high level of competence in LGBT youth, we can decrease the number of LGBT youth on the streets thus lowering the number of RHY.