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Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Oversight Hearing Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth
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We would like to thank Chair Stevens and all the members of the Committee on Youth Services for holding this oversight hearing on the needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY). This testimony highlights the following issues impacting youth: accessing CityFHEPS housing vouchers, funding for vital positions within the RHY system, the DYCD drop in directive prohibiting RHY from sleeping in drop-in centers, providing more beds for young adults, and ensuring the needs of migrant youth are met.

Numerous challenges currently face Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in New York. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is mainly responsible for supporting this population; however, it is not uncommon for RHY to also be involved with ACS, DHS, and HRA in the efforts to find housing or social services.

Drop-In Centers

When DYCD made the announcement forbidding the 24-hour drop-in centers to allow youth to sleep, there was immediate outcry. Sleeping is essential to human functioning and should be a right that every young person has. RHY often do not have a safe place to sleep, and therefore, the drop-in centers became a space where they knew they could rest without fear. This directive is therefore inhumane by preventing young people the chance to sleep where they feel safe, ultimately enabling them to better participate in school, jobs, and beneficial city programs. **We urge DYCD to rescind this policy and instead offer guidance and support to providers who are working with RHY to connect them to more sustainable housing options.**

Addressing Shelter Needs and Permit Access to Housing

RHY currently have limited options for a permanent exit out of homelessness, as they can currently only access CityFHEPs and Emergency Housing Vouchers through a pilot that is scheduled to expire. Outside of that pilot, RHY must go through the DHS shelter system and wait 90 days before they are able to access CityFHEPS. As a result of these limitations, in NYC Fiscal Year 2022, 39% of youth were discharged from a temporary shelter into another shelter or into an unknown housing situation, while only a small fraction secured permanent housing.¹

It is critical to ensure that young people experiencing homelessness, aging out of foster care, or leaving detention and placement can utilize the CityFHEPS voucher immediately, without having to register the DHS shelter system and wait 90 days for eligibility. If we can ensure young people can access housing, it is more likely they will be able to find stability, sustain employment, and thrive. **City leaders must reform CityFHEPS so that runaway and homeless youth can utilize vouchers without having to enter the DHS shelter system and must also eliminate the 90 day stay rule for CityFHEPs eligibility.**

Additionally, RHY need access to more beds and more support. DYCD does not have enough beds for young people (especially older youth), so many young people are driven into dangerous living situations. There are currently only 60 funded young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system for youth ages 21-24, but only 45 are currently available. Even when all 60 are operational, they do not come close to meeting the need of young adults in need. To ensure that older youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth specific shelter supports, DYCD must prioritize funding for more beds for the older youth population. **Therefore, the City must invest \$2.42 million to create 40 additional DYCD RHY beds for youth ages 21-24.** This investment will provide safe, temporary housing for youth who otherwise would be without a stable option.

We also urge the city to invest \$1.62 million to maintain funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System. The housing and youth services systems are complex and convoluted, and it is critical to have a trusted support person to offer advice, resources, and answers for young people.

Needs of Migrant Youth

For the past year, NYC has seen an unprecedented number of migrant youth arrive. However, there continues to be minimal coordination across city agencies and systems to meet their needs. The City needs to acknowledge and support the youth, which includes meeting the needs of the RHY-system. This includes providing:

- Translation services for youth navigating a multitude of systems
- Transportation support for family reunification
- Legal supports for migrant youth
- Access to permanent housing and pathways to employment
- Policies to specifically support the needs of unaccompanied minors

The City must devote greater resources to young people in the runaway and homeless youth system. Homeless young people are some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers and if we want to eliminate youth homelessness, we must ensure there are structures of care in place that can connect youth to needed support and permanent housing.

ⁱ Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. New York City YHPD Planning Committee. 2022.