AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

# DISCONNECTED AND DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INCOME SECURITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JUNE 19, 2007

**Serial No. 110–48**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Ways and Means

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

43–759 WASHINGTON : 2008

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

## COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

CHARLES B. RANGEL, New York, *Chairman*

FORTNEY PETE STARK, California
SANDER M. LEVIN, Michigan
JIM McDERMOTT, Washington
JOHN LEWIS, Georgia
RICHARD E. NEAL, Massachusetts
MICHAEL R. McNULTY, New York
JOHN S. TANNER, Tennessee
XAVIER BECERRA, California
LLOYD DOGGETT, Texas
EARL POMEROY, North Dakota
STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES, Ohio
MIKE THOMPSON, California
JOHN B. LARSON, Connecticut
RAHM EMANUEL, Illinois
EARL BLUMENAUER, Oregon
RON KIND, Wisconsin
BILL PASCRELL, Jr., New Jersey
SHELLEY BERKLEY, Nevada
JOSEPH CROWLEY, New York
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland
KENDRICK MEEK, Florida
ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ, Pennsylvania
ARTUR DAVIS, Alabama

JIM McCRERY, Louisiana
WALLY HERGER, California
DAVE CAMP, Michigan
JIM RAMSTAD, Minnesota
SAM JOHNSON, Texas
PHIL ENGLISH, Pennsylvania
JERRY WELLER, Illinois
KENNY C. HULSHOF, Missouri
RON LEWIS, Kentucky
KEVIN BRADY, Texas
THOMAS M. REYNOLDS, New York
PAUL RYAN, Wisconsin
ERIC CANTOR, Virginia
JOHN LINDER, Georgia
DEVIN NUNES, California
PAT TIBERI, Ohio
JON PORTER, Nevada

JANICE MAYS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*
BRETT LOPER, *Minority Staff Director*

---

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INCOME SECURITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

JIM McDERMOTT, Washington, *Chairman*

FORTNEY PETE STARK, California
ARTUR DAVIS, Alabama
JOHN LEWIS, Georgia
MICHAEL R. McNULTY, New York
SHELLEY BERKLEY, Nevada
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland
KENDRICK MEEK, Florida

JERRY WELLER, Illinois
WALLY HERGER, California
DAVE CAMP, Michigan
JON PORTER, Nevada
PHIL ENGLISH, Pennsylvania

Pursuant to clause 2(e)(4) of Rule XI of the Rules of the House, public hearing records of the Committee on Ways and Means are also published in electronic form. **The printed hearing record remains the official version.** Because electronic submissions are used to prepare both printed and electronic versions of the hearing record, the process of converting between various electronic formats may introduce unintentional errors or omissions. Such occurrences are inherent in the current publication process and should diminish as the process is further refined.

# CONTENTS


| | Page |
|---|---|
| Advisory of June 12, 2007, announcing the hearing | 2 |

WITNESSES

| | |
|---|---|
| The Honorable John Yarmuth, a Representative in Congress from the State of Kentucky | 6 |
| The Honorable Michele Bachmann, a Representative in Congress from the State of Minnesota | 9 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Jewel, Recording Artist | 14 |
| Deborah Shore, Executive Director, Sasha Bruce Youthwork | 20 |
| DeCario Whitfield | 28 |
| Ronald B. Mincy, Ph.D., Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice, Columbia University School of Social Work | 31 |
| Martha R. Burt, Ph.D., Research Associate, Center on Labor, Human Services and Population, The Urban Institute | 36 |
| Dan Lips, Education Analyst, The Heritage Foundation | 46 |

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

| | |
|---|---|
| Center for Law and Social Policy, statement | 75 |
| Greater Miami Service Corps, statement | 82 |
| Honorable Rubén Hinojosa, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas, statement | 85 |
| National Council For Adoption, statement | 87 |
| National Human Services Assembly, statement | 89 |
| National Network for Youth, statement | 92 |
| National YouthBuild Coalition, statement | 96 |

# DISCONNECTED AND DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

**TUESDAY, JUNE 19, 2007**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INCOME SECURITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT,
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m., in room B–318, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Jim McDermott (Chairman of the Subcommittee), presiding.

[The advisory announcing the hearing follows:]

# *ADVISORY*

FROM THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON INCOME SECURITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 19, 2007
ISFS–8

CONTACT: (202) 225–1025

# McDermott Announces Hearing on Disconnected and Disadvantaged Youth

Congressman Jim McDermott (D–WA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support of the Committee on Ways and Means, today announced that the Subcommittee will hold a hearing on disconnected and disadvantaged youth. **The hearing will take place on Tuesday, June 19, 2007, at 1:00 p.m. in room B–318, Rayburn House Office Building.**

In view of the limited time available to hear witnesses, oral testimony at this hearing will be from invited witnesses only. However, any individual or organization not scheduled for an oral appearance may submit a written statement for consideration by the Committee and for inclusion in the printed record of the hearing.

**BACKGROUND:**

Approximately 2.3 million noninstitutionalized youth between the ages of 16 and 24 have neither attended school, nor worked at anytime over the last year according to the most recent data compiled by the Congressional Research Service. Additionally, past studies suggest that at least 1 million children between the ages of 12 to 17 experience some period of homelessness every year.

A myriad of issues may lead to youth becoming detached from school and work and/or becoming homeless, including poverty, inferior schools, the lack of economic opportunity, racial discrimination, substance abuse, teenage parenthood, interaction with the criminal justice system, family instability and violence, and a difficult transition from foster care. There are a number of programs that either specifically or indirectly focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable youth, but some experts have suggested the overall response is fragmented and serves only a fraction of those in need.

While the issue of disconnected youth is not new, the problem has increased in recent years for certain groups. For example, the percentage of African American men between the age of 20 and 24 who are both out of work and out of school rose from 9.5 percent in 1998 to 14.1 percent in 2005. This rate would climb significantly if it included young men who were incarcerated.

In announcing the hearing, Chairman McDermott stated, **"We cannot afford to lose the productive talents of millions of our youngest citizens who cannot find a place in the world of school and work. Nor can we stand by as some of them go without the bare essentials of life, starting with a place to call home. We need to search for a better way to reconnect these youth to what so many of us take for granted."**

**FOCUS OF THE HEARING:**

The hearing will focus on disconnected, disadvantaged and homeless youth.

**DETAILS FOR SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS:**

**Please Note:** Any person(s) and/or organization(s) wishing to submit for the hearing record must follow the appropriate link on the hearing page of the Committee website and complete the informational forms. From the Committee homepage, *http://waysandmeans.house.gov*, select "*110th Congress*" from the menu entitled, "*Hearing Archives*" (*http://waysandmeans.house.gov/Hearings.asp?congress=18*). Select the hearing for which you would like to submit, and click on the link entitled, "*Click here to provide a submission for the record.*" Once you have followed the online instructions, completing all informational forms and clicking "submit" on the final page, an email will be sent to the address which you supply confirming your interest in providing a submission for the record. You ***MUST REPLY*** to the email and ***ATTACH*** your submission as a Word or WordPerfect document, in compliance with the formatting requirements listed below, by close of business **July 3, 2007**. **Finally**, please note that due to the change in House mail policy, the U.S. Capitol Police will refuse sealed-package deliveries to all House Office Buildings. For questions, or if you encounter technical problems, please call (202) 225–1721.

**FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS:**

The Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record. As always, submissions will be included in the record according to the discretion of the Committee. The Committee will not alter the content of your submission, but we reserve the right to format it according to our guidelines. Any submission provided to the Committee by a witness, any supplementary materials submitted for the printed record, and any written comments in response to a request for written comments must conform to the guidelines listed below. Any submission or supplementary item not in compliance with these guidelines will not be printed, but will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

1. All submissions and supplementary materials must be provided in Word or WordPerfect format and MUST NOT exceed a total of 10 pages, including attachments. Witnesses and submitters are advised that the Committee relies on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record.

2. Copies of whole documents submitted as exhibit material will not be accepted for printing. Instead, exhibit material should be referenced and quoted or paraphrased. All exhibit material not meeting these specifications will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

3. All submissions must include a list of all clients, persons, and/or organizations on whose behalf the witness appears. A supplemental sheet must accompany each submission listing the name, company, address, telephone and fax numbers of each witness.

Note: All Committee advisories and news releases are available on the World Wide Web at *http://waysandmeans.house.gov*.

The Committee seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202–225–1721 or 202–226–3411 TTD/TTY in advance of the event (four business days notice is requested). Questions with regard to special accommodation needs in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats) may be directed to the Committee as noted above.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. The Committee will come to order.

Today we're going to talk about homelessness. There are too many Americans out of school and out of work and out of their homes and really out of luck, and it's time for America to pay more attention, because we can make a difference and I believe we really must make a difference.

In 2005 there were 2.3 million youths between the ages of 16 and 24 who did not work or attend school at any time. That's a lot of kids. Estimates for the number of homeless youth are more dated and more varied, but there are likely more than 1 million in any given year.

The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the pathways that lead to young people becoming detached from school, work and housing. We also hope to learn about both existing and potential programs designed to help prevent and respond to homelessness and separation from school and work.

Both our hearts and our heads should propel us toward improving our outreach to these young Americans. The thought of a teenage person confronting homelessness or pondering life without hope should stir the emotions in all of us.

The reality that reconnecting youth will improve so many other concerns confronting our nation illustrates the wisdom of moving forward. Issues like long-term economic development, crime, and poverty are all intertwined with the lives of these young people.

None of this is meant to suggest that there's a simple answer that will respond to all the needs of disadvantaged kids. There are a variety of circumstances that might lead to a young person becoming homeless or dropped out of the worlds of school or work. Poverty plays a lead role but family instability, teenage parenthood and many other factors also contribute to the problem.

While the issue of disconnected youth is certainly not new, data suggest the problem may be growing for certain groups, especially young black men. Additionally the long-term costs of dropping out of school may be higher than ever given the premium the global economy places on education and skills.

There are some very helpful programs that reach out to disadvantaged youth, one of which we'll hear about today. However questions still linger about whether there are enough of these programs, whether they address the myriad of new challenges kids face today from higher housing costs to declining manufacturing jobs and whether there is a way to tie them together in a more systematic way.

Furthermore, there are certain broader policies related to education and housing and making work pay that would likely provide significant dividends for disadvantaged youth. Finally, this Subcommittee takes special notice of the fact that youth coming out of the foster care system, they've been in the foster care system up to age 18, are suddenly dropped on the street cold, and they are at a particular risk of being both homeless and jobless. Our burden to help these kids is especially high since the government has acted as their legal parent. Your parents don't ordinarily shove you out of the house at 18 with nothing, but that's basically what we do to young people in the foster care system.

The Subcommittee will hold future hearings to look specifically at that particular part of the issue. I would like to now yield to the Subcommittee's ranking member, Mr. Weller. Jerry.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for conducting this important hearing today. Today's hearing is on disconnected youth. As we will hear, disconnected youth include those who drop out of school, do not work and often end up in the streets.

The very title "disconnected youth" begs the question how are kids connected. The answer is two ways, through their family and through their school. Kids are connected through their family starting with the love and support of their parents, and that goes beyond financial support to the deep sense of belonging associated

with being a son or daughter who is loved, protected, and encouraged on the road of life.

As one of our witnesses puts it, we should all remain mindful that strengthening families is the best way to prevent the suffering and social disconnection among our young people. I totally agree.

The second way kids are connected, especially as they get older, is through their school. That really means through the circle of friends, teachers, coaches and other mentors they rely on as they become more independent and develop the habits and skills needed for life on their own.

Think about kids who don't have both or even one of those connections. Kids in foster care have been removed from their own parents due to abuse and neglect. That's traumatic enough, but now add in the fact that many foster children are bounced not only from home to home but also from school to school.

A 2004 study of young adults in the Midwest found that over a third of those who aged out of foster care reported having had five or more school changes. Five or more school changes for a group already separated from their parents, that's the definition of disconnection.

Studies show high school students who change schools even once are less than half as likely to graduate as those who don't change schools. No wonder there is a 20 percentage point difference between the high school graduation rates of foster youth and their peers according to the group Kids Count, all of which contributes to the often grim prospects for children of foster care, especially those who spend the most time in care and bounce from school to school and thus are the most likely to drop out.

According to the Nonpartisan American Youth Policy Forum, high school dropouts are substantially more likely to be unemployed and on welfare. Youth who drop out are three-and-a-half times more likely to be incarcerated during their lifetimes. Those who work earn 50 percent less than those with high school diplomas. Even the death rate for youth who drop out of school is higher.

So, it seems to me we should be doing everything we can to increase high school completion rates in general. For kids in foster care who are already disconnected from their parents it is especially important for them to stay connected to their school including the friends, teachers and mentors they trust and who know them.

I welcome the broader testimony we will hear today about homelessness and the various funding sources beyond the scope of this Subcommittee addressing that. I am very eager, especially eager, to focus on what we can do within the foster care system to increase the chances these already vulnerable children at the very least get their high school diplomas.

Fortunately, as we will hear, there are good options some states are already putting into effect. We should spread the word and consider enacting Federal legislation that provides more foster youth the opportunity to stay better connected to their schools, to graduate and to create the foundation for productive and happy lives.

I look forward to hearing all of today's testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you. Other members are welcome to make entries into the record, and without objection we will accept them.

We're going to begin today by having a couple of Members of Congress. It's very seldom that Members of Congress come and ask to testify at something, so I want you to realize that this is a unique event. Today John Yarmuth from the third congressional district in Kentucky will begin, and he'll be followed by Michele Bachmann from the sixth district of Minnesota.

John.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN YARMUTH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF KENTUCKY**

Mr. YARMUTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McDermott, Ranking Member Weller and colleagues, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today at this hearing on disconnected and disadvantaged youth.

As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, I, like you, have a high level of interest in youth who are detached from family, school, work and any sort of permanency. Our missions are similar, and I look forward to finding common ground where our Committees can work together to address the life challenges of our nation's disconnected youth.

Before coming to Washington I volunteered a considerable amount of time at organizations that work with disconnected youth. We are fortunate in my hometown of Louisville to house some of the finest services for disconnected youth in the nation with the headquarters of the National Safe Place and Boys' Haven.

There I saw firsthand the hardships and devastation resulting from homelessness. My experiences with these agencies and Kentucky's disconnected youth have served as a reminder that homelessness is more than a collection of sociological and economic data, as it sometimes ends up being viewed here in the halls of Congress, but a myriad of human stories.

I am thankful that Jewel and DeCario Whitfield are here today to share some of those stories with us, to help us understand that of the 3 million children who run away or experience homelessness each year, each one has a story of abuse, physical, psychological or emotional, and each child is in need of structure, stability and permanency.

Unfortunately, despite the superb work of organizations across the country we are failing these children at every turn. The funds and personnel to accommodate the bare necessities of so many Americans in need have simply not been made available. We must explore and implement measures to incentivize careers that provide these badly needed services to our communities.

Last week in the Education and Labor Committee we adopted an amendment to the College Cost Reduction Act that will incentivize such work with $1,000 in loan forgiveness each year for five years. I believe this measure is a good start, but there is far more to do to build an infrastructure capable of responding to the pandemic problem of disconnected youth.

As I have found working with Congresswoman McCarthy on the reauthorization of the Runaway Homeless Youth Act, the story gets

much worse once one realizes that the failings are not limited to just funding and personnel. The necessary infrastructure is simply not in place.

The upside is that we are in a position to change that if we focus our energy in the right areas. Luckily for us, the deficiencies are glaring and practically begging us to step in. For example, we have little to no ability to monitor success of programs serving disconnected youth.

Homeless youth enter these systems temporarily and then leave. There is currently no comprehensive system linking juvenile courts, foster care, homeless shelters, schools, hospitals and social service providers. So, we don't know where they go and we don't offer services once they have gone. They are simply out of the system, disconnected once more.

We must do more than just contain these little children while we have them. They have come into the system lost, reaching out, and we must set them on a path to adulthood prepared for the workplace and ready for the world without dragging the dead weight of a history of neglect.

They also face a hurdle that won't surprise anyone here because it is consistent with one out of six Americans: no access to health care. With our nation's disconnected youth, we are talking about children often living in unsanitary conditions, many the victims of abuse and all of whom are in need of care.

At a minimum, we have an obligation to tend to the health of these children through Medicaid or other means. Providing health care to these 3 million American children cannot be treated as an option any longer.

In my three-minute assessment of the failings in the area of disconnected youth, the hurdles may seem insurmountable, but we cannot let ourselves get so caught up in the distance we have to go that we become too intimidated to take the next step forward.

Ultimately, we need to consolidate our resources and services for the disconnected so that they no longer get lost in the system while seeking services. A homeless shelter can be more than a place to stay and eat a meal. It can be a place to access comprehensive services like health care, education, economic assistance and job training. When these scattered services can be found under one roof, we will truly be offering a path to housing, employment and independence.

In our reauthorization of the Runaway Homeless Youth Act we've taken steps to help children prepare for adulthood with the transitional living program that teaches homeless 15 to 18 year olds life's basics: cooking, laundry, financial literacy and the basics of finding a job.

The legislation also tackles the absolute basics with a national switchboard to provide help by phone or e-mail to those who need it, the Basic Center Program, that gives young people a place to stay while they reintegrate with their families and the Street Outreach Program that will very simply make connections with kids on the streets.

It is my hope that our Committees can work together to make a much stronger and broader impact by exploring the possibilities of expanding temporary assistance for needy families to include

disconnected youth who have children, fully utilizing the Social Service Block Grants to fund organizations that help foster children and runaways and ensuring that children are tapping into Federal welfare services that will help these young Americans prepare to face the world.

As we move forward together on issues facing disconnected youth, I hope we all feel not only the urgency to act but that we also share a sense of optimism for what we can accomplish together on behalf of youth in every corner of America. I look forward to the reauthorization of the Runaway Homeless Youth Act, the findings of this hearing and future progress we make in this institution. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Yarmuth follows:]

**Prepared Statement of The Honorable John Yarmuth, a Representative in Congress from the State of Kentucky**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at this hearing on Disconnected and Disadvantaged Youth. As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, I, like you, have a high level of interest in youth who are detached from family, school, work, and any sort of permanency. Our missions are similar, and I look forward to finding common ground where our committees can work together to address the life challenges of our nation's disconnected youth.

Before coming to Washington, I volunteered a considerable amount of time at organizations that work with disconnected youth. We are fortunate in my hometown of Louisville to house some of the finest services for disconnected youth in the nation with the headquarters for National Safe Place and Boys' Haven. There, I saw first hand the hardships and devastation that comes as a result of homelessness.

My experiences with these agencies and Kentucky's disconnected youth have served as a reminder that homelessness is more than a collection of sociological and economic data—as it can sometimes seem here in the halls of Congress—but a myriad of human stories. I am thankful that Jewel and DeCario Whitfield are here today to share some of those stories with us, to help us understand that of the three million children who runaway or experience homelessness each year, each one has a story of story of abuse: physical, psychological, or emotional. And each child is in need of structure, stability, and permanency in their lives.

Unfortunately, despite the superb work of the organizations I named and others such as the National Network for Youth and Alliance to End Homelessness—the system is failing these children at every turn. The funds and personnel to accommodate the bare necessities of so many Americans in need are simply not available. We must explore and implement measures that incentivize careers that provide these badly needed services to our communities. Last week, I introduced an amendment to the College Cost Reduction Act that will incentivize work in such areas with $1,000 in loan forgiveness each year for five years. I believe that this measure is a good start, but there is far more to do to build an infrastructure capable of dealing with a problem of this magnitude.

As I found in my work with Congresswoman McCarthy and our work on the reauthorization for the Runaway Homeless Youth Act, the story gets much worse once one realizes that the failings are not limited to just funding and personnel; the necessary services are simply not in place. The upside is that we are in a position to change that if we focus our energy in the right areas. Luckily for us, the deficiencies are glaring and practically begging us to step in.

For example: We have little to no ability to monitor success. Homeless youth enter these systems temporarily and then leave. We don't know where they go, we don't offer services once they have gone, they are simply out of the system—disconnected once more. We cannot be content to simply contain these children while we have them. They have come into the system lost, reaching out, and we must set them on a path to adulthood prepared for the workplace and ready for the world, without dragging the dead weight of a history of neglect.

They also face a hurdle that won't surprise anyone here because it is consistent with one out of six Americans: No access to healthcare. With our nation's disconnected youth we are talking about children living in unsanitary conditions without guidance, many the victims of abuse, and all of whom are in need of care. We have an obligation to, at a bare minimum; tend to the health of these children, whether

through Medicaid or other means. Providing healthcare to these three million American children cannot be treated as an option any longer.

In my three minute assessment of the failings in the area of disconnected youth, the hurdles seem insurmountable . . . even to me. But we cannot let ourselves get so caught up in the distance we have to go that we become too intimidated to take the next step forward.

In our reauthorization, we've taken steps to help children prepare for adulthood with a Transitional Living Program that teaches homeless 15 to 18 year-old to do the basics: cooking, laundry, learn financial literacy and the basics of finding a job. It tackles the absolute basics, with the National Switchboard to provide help by phone or email to those who need it, the Basic Center Program that gives young people a place to stay while they reintegrate with their families, and the Street Outreach Program that will very simply make connections with kids on the streets.

Likewise, our committees can work together on the next relatively small but crucial steps: expanding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to include disconnected youth who have children, utilizing the Social Service Block Grants to fund organizations that help foster children and runaways, and ensuring that children are tapping into federal welfare services that can ensure that when young Americans move on from these services, they are truly ready to face the world.

As we move forward together on issues facing disconnected youth, I hope that you are—like me—feeling the urgency to act, but also optimistic for what we can accomplish together on behalf of youth in every corner of America. I look forward to the reauthorization of the Runaway Homeless Youth Act, the findings of this hearing, and future progress we take in this institution. Thank you.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you.

Ms. Bachmann.

## STATEMENT OF MICHELE BACHMANN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Ms. BACHMANN. Thank you, Chairman McDermott, Congressman Weller and members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank you for inviting me to discuss the educational challenges that are faced by disconnected and disadvantaged youth, specifically foster children.

My name is Michele Bachmann. I'm a first term Member of Congress, serving Minnesota's sixth district, and I have a very special interest in the quality of education received by foster children because, over the course of six years, my husband, who is present here today, Marcus Bachmann, and my family cared for 23 treatment-level foster children in our home.

We are the lucky parents of five biological children, but we feel that we were even more blessed by having 23 foster children come into our home. When the children came to us, they were not babies, Mr. Chairman, they were teenagers. They had come through a number of horrendous experiences. Many of them had been abused in many different ways.

They weren't your typical foster children. They were in need of greater depth of services. Many of them had lived in numerous homes throughout their lives and again had experienced various levels of abuse. We were honored to be able to bring these children into our home, Mr. Chair. What we saw is that what these children needed more than anything was love, acceptance and stability. While we were by no means a perfect family one thing that we could offer to these children was just a little bit of a picture of what the word normal looks like.

Here's a mom and a dad who love each other. Here is a fairly regular schedule. Here's a mom who cooks a meal, a dad who goes to work. This is what normal, a snapshot of normal might look like for the life of a child.

We immediately enrolled our children in our local public school system. We live in a nice suburban area of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and we were glad to be able to have our children in our local public schools system. Our biological children were enrolled in a local private school with fairly low class sizes and fairly low overall population in that school system.

Over the course of the years, our foster children often would ask me if I would be willing to home school them. Occasionally they asked if they could attend our children's private school and we had to tell them, no, we were unable to do that, that they needed to attend our local public school.

Again, our local public schools were good, but it was a new experience and they often had 700 children in the graduating class. Oftentimes, without exception our foster children all had an IEP, an individualized education plan. Without exception, they had a social worker assigned to them, a counselor assigned to them. They did have support systems but oftentimes they were in a situation where they were seen as transient and temporary.

One thing that we wanted to give our foster children, Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee was a sense of permanence and a sense of stability so they could feel that, as they went through their life there's something that they could count on, that they could always come back to. We wanted to make sure that they had that. Part of that—we know at the Federal level there's the Chafee Program for foster students that goes to the college level where students can attend a school of their choice in this transitional period.

One thing that we would like to ask the Committee to look at is the idea that there could also be a program available specifically for foster children of all ages that would allow for this possibility of choice for them as well so that they could have this idea of stability. If their parents, their biological parents would agree, if the social workers would agree, if there might be an option, whether it's a public school, a charter school, of which—my husband and I began a charter school in our city; it's the oldest charter school in the United States for K–12 at risk youth—or if they would choose a private school so that they could—if they changed homes they could still stay in the same school, so that they could have that sense of stability.

We still stay in communication with our foster children. We are grateful to say that all of our foster children, all 23 are doing well. They've graduated from high school. One of our foster daughters today is in college and plans to get her PhD.

This is the same foster child who said to me when she was enrolled in our public school, "you know, Mom, I was put into stupid people math." One thing that she felt is that, because she was seen as a temporary student she was put in lower level classes that weren't up to her ability. This is a student today who's planning to go for her PhD.

We believed in her. My husband and I loved her, as I'm sure many foster parents have done for their foster children, but what

we want to do is to make sure that the potential in every child is fully realized, and I know that the Committee shares that same goal. We want to be able to do that, bringing and creating a life of stability and choice for every foster child just as our five biological children had that same opportunity. We want to make sure that's available for our foster children as well.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chair. It's obvious that you have a heart of gold and that the members of this Committee do as well—that we can work together and try to do something really good for America's foster children. I thank you. I thank the members of this Committee.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bachmann follows:]

**Prepared Statement of The Honorable Michele Bachmann, a Representative in Congress from the State of Minnesota**

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Weller, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the educational challenges faced by disconnected and disadvantaged youth; specifically foster children.

I am Michele Bachmann, a first-term Member of Congress serving Minnesota's Sixth District. I have a special interest in the quality of education received by foster children because over the course of six years, my family cared for twenty-three high-need teenagers through the Lutheran Social Services' Treatment Foster Care program.

I believe every child deserves the chance to gain a high-quality education. Growing up, I attended public schools where I was taught using a rigorous curriculum despite the fact that my community was not particularly affluent. While I was in school, my parents divorced and almost overnight my stable, middle-class family was changed forever. Although times were extremely tough, whenever my three brothers and I would become frustrated my mother would tell us to concentrate on our schoolwork, because no matter what happened, no one could ever take our education away from us. She was right—I left my public high school with a quality education and went on to graduate from college, then law school, and finally to earn an L.L.M. in tax law.

Years later, when my family began to take in foster children, I felt that although our circumstances were very different, I could identify with their pain and frustration. All of them had challenges considered serious enough that they were unable to be placed through the traditional county foster care systems, and our family's role was to provide them with a safe home and see them through to their high school graduations.

We quickly learned that our foster children had very different needs than most children. Almost all of them had been given Individualized Education Plans—individual plans designed for students with special educational needs. Many of the kids had been under the care of counselors, many suffered from eating disorders, and others had difficult behavioral or learning issues. All of them had switched schools at least once, and as a result of their tumultuous home lives, none of them had very strong educational backgrounds.

While through the years some of our foster children performed better in school than others, my husband and I noticed some common problems. Many times, we got the impression that the kids were seen by both their peers and their teachers as if they were only going to be there short term. Although their teachers were welcoming, little special attention was provided to ensure that they caught up to their classmates, and their other needs were often not considered because there were so many other students to attend to. They became small fish swimming in a very large pond.

We also began to notice that not all of our foster children were presented with the quality of coursework we had thought they would receive. Many of them were placed in lower-level classes, as if they were not expected to succeed. One of the kids remarked to me once that she was in "stupid people math." Another brought home an 11th grade math assignment that involved coloring a poster. Yet another told me she had spent an entire week of classes watching movies, and others were being selected for the "School to Work" program, in which high school students attended classes for half of the day and were then sent to work minimum-wage jobs at local businesses. Although it had been evident to us from the beginning that because of their backgrounds, our foster children were going to struggle in school, it was frus-

trating to see that rather than being given the leg up they needed, so many of them felt that they were being left behind. Unfortunately, national studies indicate that this is an extremely common experience for foster children.

What made this experience so heartbreaking is we could clearly see that despite our wishes, our foster children did not get the same opportunities or attention that our biological children received in their school. Our biological children's classes were smaller and more rigorous, the teachers knew all of the students, the students knew each other, and parents were able to be much more involved in their children's educations—all goals which are not always attainable in a large school, but which could have done wonders for our foster children.

As a result of these experiences, I believe it is imperative that Congress examine creating a federal school choice program for foster children, through which foster parents are given the option to place children in their care in either a public or private school long-term, depending on their specific needs. Such a plan would allow foster children requiring more individual attention to attend a school better equipped to help them. Just as important, for the first time in their lives, these children who have become so used to being uprooted would have the chance to be placed in an environment where they could have their special educational needs met and feel as if they belong, where they could remain enrolled even if their homes changed.

Currently, the federal government operates a program for older foster children—the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program—which assists them in transitioning from foster care to life on their own. Among other things, the Chafee Program provides vouchers of up to $5,000 to foster children ages 16 through 18 for education and training. Congress should consider extending this voucher program to foster children of all ages, so foster parents are able to best meet the educational needs of the children in their care by either allowing them to choose a private school or providing them with the funds necessary to transport their children to their original school even if it is outside of their immediate area.

Additionally, Congress should consider extending the extremely successful D.C. school choice program aimed at low-income students, which has drawn more than three times the number of applications as there are available spots. Creating a similar program to serve D.C. foster children as well as those who come from low-income families would be an important step in the direction of giving the option of school choice to all foster children.

In closing, even if placed in the best families, foster children often face the possibility that they will have to change homes, and as a result they must find a safe place of their own where they can become accepted and gain a sense of stability. Although for many foster children school can be such a place, the cases of many others show that under the current system, this is not always possible. I hope my family's experiences highlight the special challenges facing foster children as well as the need for an examination of whether limiting their educational options is truly in their best interests. I thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Weller, and Subcommittee Members for the opportunity to share our story today.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you. Mr. Weller will inquire.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Bachmann, you elaborated in your testimony regarding some of your observations regarding education for children. First, let me just say, God bless you; that's a houseful over a lifetime, and we really, really want to thank you for the leadership you have shown on issues affecting foster children and also that you've demonstrated so much love and so much compassion, offering children an opportunity for a better life. I commend you for that.

I had mentioned in my opening statement that there was a study in the Midwest—and you represent Minnesota, I represent Illinois, we're Midwestern states—that over a third of those who aged out of foster care reported having five or more school changes. What has been your experience with children that you've provided a home for and the number of schools that they may have attended before they became part of your family and some of the transitions

and challenges they had, leaving friends, leaving their peers and starting over again?

Ms. BACHMANN. Mr. Chairman, Congressman Weller, you're exactly right, those are tremendous challenges. Since we were a treatment foster care home, which means we took in children who were considered more difficult than foster children out of a regular county system, we had children placed in our home from all across the State of Minnesota. In fact, I think we may have had one or two come to us from the State of Wisconsin, if I remember, that were placed in our home. They had been through numerous homes.

We had some identifying features. Almost none of our children had a father in their life. That was one thing that we could offer, but they had many, many school experiences. So, not to berate the public schools in any way, many foster children's experience is that they do tend to be at the lower achieving end because they've transitioned from school to school to school, and what one school may be studying at one time of the year may have nothing to do with what another school may be studying that a child has transferred into. So, there's not this level of continuity.

We also saw, from a number of the biological mothers whose foster children we were privileged to care for, they were also concerned about different aspects of the child's background, that they be able to have their values honored or upheld. So, we did have different foster mothers ask us if their children could attend our children's private school for instance, and we were unable to do that. We were prohibited from doing that. Even if we felt that we could afford the cost ourselves financially, that was not an option to allow foster children to be placed into the private schools.

Mr. WELLER. So, the program prevented you from——

Ms. BACHMANN. The program prevented us from placing the children either in a home school situation or in a private school situation.

We had children who graduated from high school and who remained with us because they just simply were not ready. I know the Chairman had made some remarks about some children, and yourself I believe made remarks that at age 18 they aren't necessarily ready and able to stand on their feet.

So, we did have—not all of the children but we had several children that we kept in our home and worked with over a period of time to help them gain the skills necessary so they could truly be independent. We've continued to this day to maintain contact with some of our foster children so that we can continue to offer that level of support.

Mr. WELLER. As a follow up, many of these children, do they participate in special education programs? Are they in other programs in the school?

Ms. BACHMANN. Yes, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Weller, our foster children were in special education programs. They were also in regular classrooms as well, but again, one of our foster daughters who had made the comment to me, "Mom, I've been put in stupid people math," also came home and told me that in her math class, for instance, in eleventh grade, she was coloring posters, she wasn't learning math.

In some classes she was watching feature length films all week. She wasn't doing academics. I was very concerned. Personally I had come out of a middle class home, and my parents were divorced when I was in junior high. Over night, financially we were below the poverty level, and I think that's why my heart was pricked to take in foster children. I knew what it had been like to be middle class. I knew what it had been like to be in a poverty situation, and I was very concerned that my foster children would have great academic opportunities in order to make something out of themselves.

Coming from a below poverty background, because we had a decent public school system I was able to work my way through college, work my way through law school, work my way through a post-doctorate in tax law and be able to support myself. If anyone needs a leg up in life, it is foster children. I can tell you that from personal experience.

That's why I want to make sure that we offer every parameter of opportunity to these great kids. They are really great kids. They just want to know someone loves them, someone cares for them, someone will be there to hold their back. Any amount of stability that we can offer these kids will go miles down the road for their future lives.

Mr. WELLER. We've run out of time here but I also add, it's clear that these children also suffer from the disadvantage of low expectations.

Ms. BACHMANN. Yes.

Mr. WELLER. When they're placed in schools because of their circumstances people expect them to be able to perform less well as other kids, that's a disadvantage they also have to overcome. So, again, thank you for your commitment and taking care of so many kids and helping give other children opportunities.

Ms. BACHMANN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you both for coming. We will see you again.

Our next panel will come up to the table. A group of people here, some who are working in homes for the homeless and some are people who have experienced the whole nine yards. We will begin with a young woman who has had the experience personally and we'll let her tell her own story. Jewel.

You want to push the button and put yourself in live.

**STATEMENT OF JEWEL KILCHER, RECORDING ARTIST**

Ms. KILCHER. How's that? You'd think I could work a microphone.

Chairman McDermott, Ranking Member Weller and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today on behalf of those who otherwise have no voice, America's homeless, disconnected and disadvantaged youth.

The issue of homeless youth is complicated by misperceptions about why kids become homeless. Many of us here today have probably seen youth homelessness but really didn't realize that it was staring us in the face. Maybe you walked by a kid who was sitting on a bench and rather than thinking he was homeless or someone who was forced into prostitution in order to make enough money

to eat every day, you thought he looked like maybe just a punk kid who ditched school and was waiting for his friends.

You really have to consider what being homeless is like for a few confused, long and lonely days. The experience doesn't just last for a few days for most people. Consider spending years on the streets after being kicked out of your house by an abusive alcoholic mother. Consider being in foster care where your new foster parents don't seem to care whether you're there or not and never asked you what you need.

What if the home you've been placed in is abusive and dysfunctional? You may either run away because no one seems to care or you are told at age 18 you have to leave because you are too old for foster care. There are no resources available to you and you are now homeless.

Think about your children or grandchildren. Think for a second about a 12-year-old girl. What if her first sexual experience didn't come at a time of her choosing but after an uncle touched her and made her keep it a secret? Then the secret is exposed, the truth spirals out of control, forcing a needlessly ashamed and frightened girl onto the streets.

These girls and boys do not choose to live on the streets or be homeless. It is the sad truth that they feel safer there.

What is equally troubling is that many Americans look at someone's being homeless as the result of a choice he or she made, that they are lazy or that it is just a correctable condition because the United States is the land of so much opportunity.

These are just a few of the reasons why I do not believe America's homeless youth population is made up of kids who leave home because they want to. Most homeless kids are on the streets because they have been forced by circumstances to think that they are safer there than in any home they once knew. Others may have reached the end of their economic resources or those of their family and are left trying to get out of poverty from the disadvantageous position of America's streets.

I experienced homelessness firsthand. I moved out when I was 15 years old. I worked several jobs. I wasn't a lazy kid. It was just I thought I could do a better job than my parents.

I was able to get a scholarship to a performance arts high school and was able, while being homeless, to still go to a good school. Spring breaks were hard vacations. I would end up just hitchhiking around the country and street-singing for money because they wouldn't let you stay on campus during the breaks.

After many twists and turns I ended up in San Diego when I was 18, and I had a series of dead-end jobs and finally one boss fired me because I wouldn't have sex with him and he wouldn't give me my paycheck that day. My rent was due and my landlord kicked me out.

I thought, I'll just stay—I had a little $200 car that a friend let me use—and I just slept in my car for the day, and it ended up lasting about a year. I was really sick at the time. I had sick kidneys and was turned away from every emergency room that there was to the point where you'd get blood poisoning because your kidneys weren't working, and I'd be throwing up in my car and nobody would help.

This lasted for about a year and I was able to finally get out. I'll never forget. Record labels started coming to see me. I was singing in a coffee shop. I wrote music just to help myself feel better, and it seemed to make other people feel better, and they started coming to my shows.

Atlantic Records was going to come see me, and I was so excited. I went to Denny's where I always washed my hair in a little shallow sink. I had to fit my head in sideways and use the hand soap to wash my hair and I was using paper towels to dry it off. I was humming to myself because I was so excited that a record label was coming to see me.

I looked up in the mirror and there were two women backed up against the wall and they were horrified. They looked at me just like I was a leper. I suddenly got really embarrassed because I realized what I was and what I looked like to them. As they walked out, the one woman said to the other, "well, she looked pretty enough; I wonder how she ended up like that."

I wanted to tell them so bad, "you're wrong about me. I'm an okay kid and a label is coming to see me." It ended up working out for me.

Some research estimates that about 1 million to 1.6 million youth experience homelessness each year. I personally would guess the number is higher. The number of kids turned away from shelters every day as well as the number of phone calls made to the National Runaway Hotline indicates some that it may be even higher.

Unfortunately, homeless kids are running from something, and that makes them difficult to find or to count as part of any single community. What is clear is that life in a shelter or on the streets puts homeless kids and youth at a higher risk for physical and sexual assault, abuse, and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS.

As I heard in testimony earlier, with education—I was never taught grammar, which is odd because I'm a writer and I now make my living as a writer. Every time they were teaching grammar at a school I just either showed up just after they finished the classes or just before they were starting and then I was gone again. I went to probably ten different schools between the ages of eight and sixteen, so it really is true.

Estimates suggest that 5,000 unaccompanied youths die each year as a result of assault, illness or suicide. That is an average of 13 kids dying every day on America's streets.

I was talking with—earlier who has an amazing story and amazing accomplishment. People prey on you. They know. I've never been solicited more and approached more than when I was homeless. I grew up bar singing, so you'd think it would be hard to top, but when I was homeless you're constantly being solicited, and I knew a lot of girls who were stripping and prostituting because it was really the best solution they had for making money.

Anxiety disorders, as you can imagine, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and suicide are all more common among homeless children. Previous studies of the homeless youth population have shown high rates of parental alcohol and drug abuse. Substance abuse however is not characteristic; it doesn't define most youth who experience homelessness.

Despite all of the setbacks faced by homeless kids there is room to be optimistic. Most homeless children tend to try and make it to school. Most do make it to school at least for a period of time. If safe shelters, counseling and adequate support were available for these kids and if our schools and our job training programs were stronger, these children would be given opportunities to graduate high school and build the skills they need to go on to live healthy and productive lives.

It's funny, my boyfriend of nine years laughed when he met me because he always said I could end up in Wisconsin if I needed to on a shoestring with a stick of gum, but I didn't know how to do laundry when he met me. You know, I didn't know how to do really simple functional things.

You need to be taught that. You just aren't taught those things. You don't realize that that's what your parents are supposed to be teaching you.

As I prepared to be here today I learned Congress is taking steps in the right direction this year by increasing the level of Federal support for homeless youth-related programs. I understand the House of Representatives is poised to pass a $10 million increase for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, and a $5 million increase for education of homeless children and youth programs.

This anticipated funding increase is crucial. I cannot tell you enough, support for shelters and transitional living and housing programs is necessary if we are going to change the landscape for homeless boys and girls in America.

Regrettably, I do also understand funding for street outreach programs may not receive an increase in funding this year. What I know about street outreach is that it is essential to dealing with the issue of youth homelessness.

We need people who work hard to find these kids and point them toward help because we know that they will not be looking for adults; adults most likely contributed to their situation in the first place. When they do seek help from adults, the system, police, they're just opening themselves up to be harmed and exploited or arrested again.

I am passionate about the work in this area by Virgin Mobile USA and its RE*Generation movement in supporting the homeless youth street outreach programs of StandUp For Kids and awareness building efforts by Youth Noise. The RE*Generation is also supported by Virgin Unite, the Virgin Group's charitable arm, created by Sir Richard Branson.

The fact is that businesses and organizations working together are crucial to the success of Federal programs, and broader support in this area is desperately needed.

I would like to thank Congress for its help in raising awareness of issues surrounding homeless youth by introducing resolutions that designate November as National Homeless Youth Awareness Month. I look forward to their passage so we can all make November a success by demonstrating to these forgotten youth that Congress is listening, people do want to help and that people care about their futures.

Today is an opportunity to discuss important problems facing families and children across the country. As you begin examining

ways to prevent youth homelessness, improve community-based intervention programs that support families and older adolescents and assist youth aging out of foster care, it is my hope that your job becomes easier once the problem is absorbed into the consciousness of the American people.

This country has to stop looking in the other direction on these most heart-wrenching and complex issues facing America's youth. Through greater awareness people will view this as a problem with solutions. We must all work together to end youth homelessness in America.

I am pleased to be here today, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kilcher follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Jewel, Recording Artist**

Chairman McDermott, Ranking Member Weller, and members of this Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today on behalf of those who otherwise have no voice—America's homeless, disconnected and disadvantaged youth.

The issue of homeless youth is complicated by misperceptions about why kids become homeless. Many of us here today have probably seen youth homelessness but didn't realize it was staring us in the face.

Maybe you walked by a kid who was sitting on a bench, and rather than thinking he was homeless, or someone who was forced into prostitution in order to make enough money to eat everyday, you thought he looked like a punk kid who ditched school and was waiting for his friends.

Consider being homeless for a few confused, long and lonely days. Consider spending years on the streets after being kicked out of home by an abusive, alcoholic mother. Consider being in foster care where your new foster parents don't seem to care whether you're there or not and never ask you what you need. What if the home you have been placed in is abusive and dysfunctional? You may either run away because no one seems to care, or you are told at age 18 you have to leave because you are too old for foster care. There are no resources available to you and you are now homeless.

Think about your children or grandchildren. Think for a second about a 12-year-old girl. What if her first sexual experience didn't come at a time of her choosing, but after an uncle touched her and made her keep it a secret. Then, the secret is exposed and the truth spirals out of control, forcing a needlessly ashamed and frightened girl onto the streets.

These girls and boys don't choose to live on the streets or to be homeless. It is the sad truth that they feel safer there. What is equally troubling is that many Americans look at someone's being homeless as the result of a choice he or she made, or that it is a correctable condition because the United States is the land of so much opportunity.

There are numerous causes and effects of youth homelessness. Thirty percent of shelter youth and 70% of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation at a time in their lives when these boys and girls should be going to elementary school.

These are just a few of the reasons why I do not believe America's homeless youth population is made up of kids who leave home because they want to. Most homeless kids are on the streets because they have been forced by circumstances to think that they are safer there than in the home they once knew. Others may have reached the end of their economic resources, or those of their family's, and are left trying to get out of poverty from the disadvantageous position of America's streets.

I experienced homelessness first-hand. When I was 15 years old, I received a vocal scholarship to attend Interlochen in Michigan. I always enjoyed performing solo, and one Spring Break I took a train and hitchhiked in Mexico, earning money singing on street corners. Many twists and turns later, I moved to San Diego and because of a series of unfortunate events, I ended up living in a car. My car was then stolen so I had to borrow $1,000 from a friend to buy a van which ended up becoming my home. Living in a van was not romantic. I washed my hair in public bathroom sinks. People would often gawk and make comments about me. They would say how sad it was that I was homeless, but many more tried to pretend that I wasn't there. I was mortified and embarrassed of my condition, and the stigma that

was being attached to me. I can assure you that kids do not want to be on the streets or without people who care about them.

Some researchers estimate that about 1 to 1.6 million youth experience homelessness each year. The number of kids turned away from shelters every day as well as the number of phone calls made to the National Runaway Hotline indicate some estimates that may be even higher. Unfortunately, homeless kids are running from something and that makes them difficult to find or to count as part of any single community.

What is clear is that life in a shelter or on the streets puts homeless youth at a higher risk for physical and sexual assault, abuse, and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS. Estimates suggest that 5,000 unaccompanied youths die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide; that's an average of 13 kids dying every day on America's streets.

Anxiety disorders, depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and suicide are all more common among homeless children. Previous studies of the homeless youth population have shown high rates of parental alcohol or drug abuse. Substance abuse, however, is not a characteristic that defines most youth who experience homelessness.

Despite all of the setbacks faced by homeless kids, there is room to be optimistic. Most homeless children tend to make it to school, at least for a period of time. If safe shelters, counseling, and adequate support were available for these kids, and if our schools and our job training programs were stronger, these children would be given opportunities to graduate high school and build the skills they need to go on to live healthy and productive lives.

As I prepared to be here with you today, I learned Congress is taking steps in the right direction this year by increasing the level of federal support for homeless youth-related programs. I understand the House of Representatives is poised to pass a $10 million increase for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs and a $5 million increase for Education of Homeless Children and Youth programs. This anticipated funding increase is crucial. Support for shelters and transitional living and housing programs is necessary if we are going to change the landscape for homeless boys and girls in America.

Regrettably, I also understand funding for street outreach programs may not receive an increase in funding this year. What I know about street outreach is that it is essential to dealing with the issue of youth homelessness. We need people who work hard to find these kids and point them toward help, because we know they won't be looking for adults. Adults most likely contributed to their situation in the first place. When they do seek help from adults, the system, or a police officer, they are opening themselves up to being harmed, exploited, or arrested—again.

I am passionate about the work in this area by Virgin Mobile USA and its RE*Generation movement in supporting the homeless youth street outreach programs of StandUp For Kids and awareness building efforts by YouthNoise. The RE*Generation is also supported by Virgin Unite, the Virgin Group's charitable arm created by Sir Richard Branson. The fact is that businesses and organizations working together are crucial to the success of federal programs, and broader support in this area is desperately needed.

I would like to thank Congress for its help in raising awareness of issues surrounding homeless youth by introducing resolutions that designate November as "National Homeless Youth Awareness Month". I look forward to their passage so we can all make November a success by demonstrating to these forgotten youth that Congress is listening, people do want to help, and that people care about their futures.

Today is an opportunity to discuss important problems facing families and children across the country. As you begin examining ways to prevent youth homelessness, improve community-based intervention programs that support families and older adolescents, and assist youth aging out of foster care, it is my hope that your job becomes easier once the problem is absorbed into the consciousness of the American people. This country has to stop looking in the other direction on these most heart-wrenching and complex issues facing America's youth. Through greater awareness, people will view this as a problem with solutions. We all must work together to end youth homelessness in America.

I am pleased to be here today and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much.

Ms. Shore is the executive director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork here in Washington, D.C. I did not say earlier, the full text of your remarks will be put in the record. We would like you to try and keep it to 5 minutes so we have some time to ask questions.

**STATEMENT OF DEBORAH SHORE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SASHA BRUCE YOUTHWORK, INC.**

Ms. SHORE. I have tried to do that, thank you. Thank you, Chairman McDermott and all members of the Subcommittee. This is a wonderful opportunity today. My name is Deborah Shore and I am the founder and executive director of Sasha Bruce here in Washington, D.C. I am honored to offer the perspective of our agency's dedicated counselors who work incredibly hard on behalf of our city's disconnected youth population. I have submitted written testimony which will provide greater detail to my brief remarks today.

Please allow me to start by describing the work of our agency. The mission of Sasha Bruce is to improve the lives of runaway, homeless, neglected and at-risk youth and their families in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. This year, more than 1,500 of Washington, D.C.'s most troubled children, teenagers and young adults will receive our assistance.

We began as a street outreach program in 1975, specifically for homeless and runaway youth, but we have grown considerably since then in response to service gaps not just for homeless teenagers but to address the wide range of issues facing disconnected young people, including those who have dropped out or have been removed from school and older youth without employment or secure housing. Today, our 14 programs are financed through a mix of Federal and D.C. government dollars, as well as considerable private sector support. We operate the only youth-specific shelter in Washington, D.C., The Sasha Bruce House. I am very honored to be accompanied today by Mr. DeCario Whitfield, a current member and client of our Youth Build Program.

I want to underscore how pleased I am that the leadership of this Committee made the decision to call a hearing on the issues and needs of the broad category of disconnected young people. I believe you have correctly recognized that this is a group of young people who defy our current structures, and for whom solutions lay in creative, coordinated, new and targeted initiatives. It is plain to us, working on the ground, that coordinated efforts between social services, schools, health care, employment and training, juvenile justice and child welfare services are needed if we are to re-attach these youth to school, training, the job market, families and community.

Our organization has been working with this broad category of youth for a long time, and therefore we believe that we bring a perspective useful to this Committee and to the Subcommittee.

A variety of circumstances typically contribute to young people becoming disconnected: difficulty with school, family stresses and disruptions and the lack of intermediate institutions, such as churches or nonprofit, community-based agencies in young people's lives. Our experience is that the number of disconnected youth is increasing. We are seeing it everyday. Disconnected youth are those currently being served as part of the important Runaway and

Homeless Youth Act funded programs but also are those youths who are entering the juvenile justice system, coming back out of the juvenile justice system, aging out of foster care, and quietly dropping out of school with no connection to training or a means to enter the workforce.

The current system of service funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is the most responsive to this broad population as it has both outreach, emergency shelter and assistance with independent and community group living programs. Some of these services, however, are limited to under 18 years so more responsive front-end services must be available to youth who are both under and over 18 and who are still struggling to be connected to a positive path toward independence. Family services, individual strength-based counseling and capacity to link youth to services is an important first entry point and should be further strengthened. These systems need to be strengthened and expanded to include additional youth and to create greater capacity.

Also, the disconnection for many from school is a point where intervention is paramount. Certainly, we know that for many youth school and family issues are the two most common reasons why they become homeless, get involved with the courts, become pregnant, do drugs, which leads to much of the negativity which is so much harder to sort out later. There is a need for there to be greater connection between the social service system and youth who are dropping out or at risk of dropping out. The school systems must be urged to put a greater priority on holding on to these youth in alternative school settings and/or establishing vocational schools and providing supplementary school services, including after school services.

Entering the workforce in this day and time, even with a high school diploma, is daunting for many of our young people and a great deal more needs to be done to construct workforce development programs, which provide help to youth, including those needing remedial assistance. It was clear that as part of the recent report done by The Brookings Institution that disconnected youth need to have targeted services available to both proceed with their basic education and get job skills, training and employment if they are to move into the middle class and not simply into poverty. Youth Build in this report was held up as a solid model of a program which should be expanded as it has all the features of what is needed and has proven to work.

As many people have mentioned already, youth who age out of foster care and who re-enter the community from the juvenile justice system are at high risk of becoming homeless and disconnected. Some estimates are as high as 50 percent of all former foster care youth become homeless at some point. These populations in my view should be specially targeted as they are at such high risk for continuing to be part of our institutional service system.

In my written testimony, I gave the Committee benefit of the alarming statistics about young people in D.C. and the grim outcomes for them, which argue loudly for more leadership to be taken toward reconnecting them to positive support systems. D.C. has dramatic statistics but is by no means alone in having so many disconnected youth in our country.

For this testimony, I would like to mention a few additional risk factors, which need to be considered——

Chairman MCDERMOTT. May I ask you to sum up?

Ms. SHORE [continuing]. When constructing a program response.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Okay?

Ms. SHORE. Health care issues, sexually transmitted disease, teen pregnancy, health care in general, drug involvement, I absolutely agree with Jewel that we are not looking at young people who typically are involved in drugs themselves but who are at risk of it and many of their parents are drug involved. Violence is a major issue for the young people that we see. The effort to combat gang violence is a very important initiative that I think needs to be tied together. Then, of course, the issue of housing and the issue of being able to provide support to the entire family is of critical importance.

I would just say that I agree that the increase in the investment in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is critical. I also would urge there to be a look that these programs can go up to age 24 because under-18 year olds, there is no magic number to the 18 age anymore. I would urge the increase in resources to the Education of Homeless Youth, Children In Youth Act, the Chafee Independence Living Program Act, and we wholeheartedly support the National Network's Place to Call Home Campaign, which is taking off shortly.

Thank you for this opportunity. I really appreciate and hope to see some real change and development as a result of this activity.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shore follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Deborah Shore, Executive Director, Sasha Bruce Youthwork**

The mission of ***Sasha Bruce Youthwork*** is to improve the lives of runaway, homeless, neglected and at-risk youth and their families in the Washington metropolitan area. This year more than 1,500 of Washington D.C.'s most troubled children, teenagers and young adults will receive our assistance. Sasha Bruce Youthwork was one of the original grantees of the landmark Runaway and Homeless Youth Act three decades ago. Our Sasha Bruce House remains the only emergency shelter for young people in the nation's capital.

We began as a street outreach project in 1974 specifically for homeless and runaway youth. But we have grown considerably since then in response to service gaps not just for homeless teenagers, but to address the wide range of issues facing *disconnected* young people, including those who have dropped-out or been removed from school and older youth without employment or secure housing. Today our fourteen programs are financed through a mix of federal and DC government dollars, as well as considerable private sector support. These include emergency shelter for runaway and homeless children; counseling within homes and on the street; counseling in pregnancy prevention; AIDS and substance abuse education; independent living programs for sixteen to twenty one year olds; after-school programming and positive youth development activities; an independent living and parenting program for young mothers and their babies; two group homes for children in the welfare system, one specifically for teen mothers; a service enriched residence as an alternative to detention for teenage boys; practical support for families leaving shelter or transitional housing; community capacity building to prevent diseases among youth exiting the juvenile justice system; and our *Youthbuild Program,* which involves classroom-based GED preparation and building trade apprenticeships in partnership with Habitat for Humanity specifically for high school dropouts.

SBY is the principal provider of services to runaway and homeless youth, as well as this broader category of "disconnected youth" in DC. Most youth-serving residential CBOs here limit access to those young people referred for services by the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Thus, our shelter, transitional living and a

host of non-residential counseling projects represent primary avenues for the *non-system-involved*, disconnected youth to receive barrier-free access to supportive services. It is by virtue of this unique mix of residential and non-residential "safety net" services for both homeless youth, disconnected youth and system-involved youth that I believe the perspective of our organization will be useful to Ways and Means and to this Subcommittee, specifically.

I want to underscore how pleased I am that the leadership of this Committee made the decision to call a hearing on the issues for and needs of this broad category of "disconnected young people." This group of young people has needs which touch various existing systems and which fall through the gaps in the educational, vocational and service system. It is plain to those of us working on the ground that a new, coordinated effort needs to be made to help re-attach these youth to expanded and targeted systems of support if we are to reverse this worrying trend. One of the important points to make here is that where many systems which exist for youth have a cut off of age 18, the group which we identify as disconnected youth must go up to age 24 as this describes the group who are still in need of help entering the adult world and who are clearly at risk without such assistance.

A variety of circumstances typically contribute to young people becoming disconnected—whether it be from schools, or family support systems, or intermediate institutions such as churches or nonprofit community based agencies. All must be addressed if our adolescents are to develop fully. However, several primary service areas stand out and are most relevant to the work of responding to these young people.

Family supports and social services help cannot be understated. The importance of programs which provide outreach and emergency shelter like those funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and other prevention programs which help to identify youth before complete disconnection from school, family and community are paramount. These services need to be working closely with the school systems and with the courts to identify youth before they have dropped out or gotten into trouble with the law. According to the Ann E. Casey Foundation, in 2005 roughly 8% of DC youth between ages 16 to 19 were neither attending school nor working. This is about 1000 disconnected teenagers. Perhaps more troubling, 16%, or approximately 5,000 young people 18 to 24 years old were neither attending school nor working. Clearly, employment and educational gaps are large and much more needs to be in place to respond to the needs which exist.

Assistance with schooling is also key, both to stay in school if possible or to get an alternative education. Many of the youth who have populated both the runaway and homeless youth system and the juvenile justice system have as an underlying problem serious educational issues. Whether because of the disruptions in their lives due to family instability or undetected learning problems, missing out on a basic education in this modern world is tantamount to being relegated to deep poverty. At least in DC, there are few vocational education opportunities and adult education programs needs to be seriously expanded.

A workforce development plan and program targeted to disconnected youth is essential if youth are to become reconnected. The Brookings Institute did an analysis recently about how to reduce poverty locally and recognized "disconnected youth" as a category which needs targeted training along with social services and housing assistance as the recipe for creating ways for people out of poverty. Social services, health services, education, workforce development and housing are the true building blocks of a solution to the constellation of problems which lead to disconnection for youth.

In developing my thoughts for this testimony, it seemed important to point out the primary risk factors which stand out and are most relevant to solving the problem at hand. I have included the information I have about the District which I think represents dramatically some of the most intractable problems in our country and so perhaps can lead the way to creative problem solving.

**Poverty, Family Instability and Child Neglect:**

In 2004, the District had one of the highest percentages of children in the United States under age 18 living below poverty (34% compared to 18% of children in the US). Family dissolution in DC is most evident among low-income people living in East-side Wards 7 and 8, where SBY operates several of its programs. These Wards are almost exclusively African-American, have the lowest per-capita income and are historically underserved. According to the *Kids Count 2006*, Wards 7 and 8 also have the highest crime rates and highest number of deaths among children and youth, death to teens and teen murders. And these wards have the highest rates for unemployment and for children receiving TANF, food stamps and Medicaid. According to the Urban Institute, more than 9,000 children receive TANF in Ward 8

alone—four times the rate for other sectors of the city, and more than half of DC's poor children live east of the Anacostia River.

These socio-economic indicators are primary risk factors for child neglect and family dissolution in DC, and in other major cities in this country. Other risk factors include a series of family-related factors such as family management problems, poor parental discipline practices, family conflict and social isolation. Other negative influences on family stability include lack of services, adolescent problem behaviors and academic failure. We need the full spectrum of federal government agencies to acknowledge and address these inter-connected socio-economic conditions as they develop public policy initiatives if we are to decrease the number of young people who are homeless and disconnected in our cities.

**Housing:**

Voluminous research evidences the severe lack of affordable housing in DC relative to the number of families of modest or low incomes. Several credible projections of affordable housing availability indicate that DC's east side neighborhoods will continue to gentrify in the coming years, regardless of recent stabilization of home prices nationally.

While housing which is affordable for low-income families becomes scarcer in DC, the demand for emergency shelter for homeless youth continues to outstrip available capacity. It is difficult to determine the number of runaway and homeless youth in the District of Columbia, but knowledgeable estimates indicate that the problem is substantial. The Homeless Services Planning and Coordinating Committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments takes an annual "snapshot" of homeless persons in order to quantify the problem. In January 2006, the *point-in-time* count was 9,369, an increase of 4 percent from January, 2005. *The DC Kids Count Collaborative, 13th Annual Fact Book 2006*, notes that homelessness in the District has increased for the fifth consecutive year. Of the families applying for shelter for the first time in 2005, an estimated 6,100 were children. While the National Runaway Switchboard handled 1,327 calls from DC youth in 2006, SBY's 24-hour emergency hotline during the past three months fielded 234 crisis calls from youth, families, schools, service agencies and police seeking our shelter services.

**Education:**

The administrative problems with DC public and charter schools are well established, and correlate to low levels of academic achievement compared to similar-sized cities. Poor educational outcomes represent profound barriers to employment success, family stability and self-sufficiency among our agency's current and future clientele.

While it is essential to improve the DC school system and to provide under-performing youth with counseling and support services, the realities of DC's education system and workforce are such that there is a serious need for supplemental education services. In fact, supplemental academic instruction coupled with positive youth development activities, vocational training and civic engagement opportunities need to be offered during after-school time in our young peoples' neighborhoods if we are to have success in improving educational outcomes throughout this country.

Some other important ancillary problems need to be addressed if there is to be a full system of service in place.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Teen Pregnancy:**

Our counselors estimate that nearly 75% of our youth are sexually active and approximately half report having been sexually assaulted. Many lack the experience of healthy intimate relationships, infrequently attend school and the realities of dysfunctional situations in many of their homes often prevent appreciation of healthy dating behaviors. The belief that social acceptance can be realized through sex (especially between young females and older males) is widespread. Runaway, homeless and other street youth may take more risks to survive, can be exploited sexually and are more prone to drug experimentation because it often forms a significant part of the fabric of street life. These risks are exacerbated by difficult political circumstances facing homeless youth of color. Many are dealing with emotional trauma from years of neglect. Few have the experience to make the right choices in difficult circumstances. It is well established that DC has the highest rates of HIV of any major US city. Our programs focus primarily on DC Wards 6, 7, and 8, the city's poorest, east-side neighborhoods, which have a high density of sexually active youth with high rates of multiple sexual partners and low condom use. This risky sexual activity is the most significant behavior that places our clients at risk for HIV infection and other communicable diseases. It should not be surprising that young people

faced with these significant health issues will have trouble prioritizing among life's many challenges and will be more likely to fail at school or become homeless.

This risky sexual activity also plays a large role in unwanted teenage pregnancies. Despite some well documented improvements in the past 2 years to once-astounding teen pregnancy rates, there continues to be an urgent need for pregnancy prevention education among young people in the District. The negative effects of adolescent childbearing are well documented and compelling, for mothers, fathers and their children. For example, 59% of women who have children before they reach twenty do not have a high school diploma by the age of 30,[1] and almost half will begin receiving welfare within five years of having their first child.[2] Studies show that children of teenage mothers have lower birth weights and are more likely to perform poorly in school.[3] Children born to mothers aged 15 or less are twice as likely to be abused or neglected in their first five years than children born to mothers aged 20–21.[4] Also, the Annie E. Casey Foundation report, *When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends*, found that fathers of children born to teen mothers earned on average $3,400 less annually than fathers of children born to 20- or 21-year-old women.[5]

**Drug Use:**

It is a common and incorrect stereotype that homeless youth are addicted to drugs. Our experience is that many homeless and disconnected youth, like other youth, do use drugs, but the majority are doing so in an ill-advised effort to survive day-by-day. In fact, at Sasha Bruce Youthwork, it is far more typical for our young clients' parents to be addicted. This is one reason, among many which I will touch on later, that a holistic approach to engaging the entire family in services is the most effective way to help children and youth.

This is not to say that drug prevention education and treatment for young people and their families is not needed. In fact, nonjudgmental education about psychoactive substances and their effects is the best way to prevent their abuse among youth, and this is particularly the case among those who have become involved—or are at greatest risk for becoming involved—in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. According to DC's Pre-Trial services, in February of 2006, 51% of juvenile arrestees tested positive for drugs. And approximately 85% of foster care placements in the District are reportedly due to substance use, whether by the parent, guardian or child.

**Violence:**

According to the Casey Foundation's *Kids Count 2006*, the rate for teen deaths in DC has skyrocketed by 40% in recent years. The majority of these deaths may be reasonably attributed to violence perpetrated by teens on other teens, almost exclusively African American teens. Further, this youth-on-youth violence has been—and likely will continue to be—concentrated in DC's poorest, East-side neighborhoods.

Violence among youth negatively impacts school attendance. In the District in 2005, 16% of students were in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the past 12 months (compared to 15% in 2004). 9% of students did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school on one or more of the past 30 days. 12% of students were threaten or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, club on school property, one or more times during the past 12 months.

There is general acceptance that youth violence in DC can be correlated with gang membership. The reasons for joining a gang include the need for marginalized youth to feel accepted, the need for money, or protection from other youth. Therefore, to address the rising tide of violence in our communities, we will need to change these attitudes and beliefs concurrent to engaging young people at highest risk for violence and gang activity into positive alternative activities.

In addition to the core set of risk factors and problematic social conditions described above, I would like to turn now to **emerging issues and service gaps** here

---

[1] V.J. Hotz et al., "The Impacts of Teenage Childbearing on the Mothers and the Consequences of those Impacts for Government," in R. Maynard (Ed.), *Kids Having Kids* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1997), pp. 55–94.

[2] J. Jacobson and R. Maynard, *Unwed Mothers and Long-Term Dependency* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research).

[3] Maynard, R.A., (Ed.). (1996). *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*, New York: Robin Hood Foundation.

[4] R.M. George and B.J. Lee, "Abuse and Neglect of the Children," in R. Maynard (Ed.), *Kids Having Kids* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1997), pp. 205–230.

[5] Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Special Report: When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998).

in DC, and which I believe are common elsewhere in this country. Relevant to the Ways and Means Committee's purview, three trends, or emerging issues, stand out and also should be considered as we seek to prevent social disconnection and homelessness among youth.

First of all, here in DC, and across the country, we must put greater resources to address the growing problem of young people "aging out" of the child welfare system. According to the District's Child and Family Services Agency, as of October 2006, 2,313 children were in foster care and 1,681 children were enrolled in "the system" and living in their natural homes. These figures combined equal 2% of all children and youth in DC, which is significantly higher than any other jurisdiction. Importantly, youth age 12 and up make up about 61% of the total foster care population—a number which many authorities believe to be rising and which is extremely high compared to other jurisdictions. These figures are causing many public policy officials to call for alternatives to foster care placement (such as emergency respite and ongoing family counseling prior to entry into the child welfare system for young people who experience conflict at home) and for a larger number of housing and options for young adults "aging out" of the system, to name just two.

Second, the lack of affordable housing in DC and other major US cities must be addressed if we are to improve the lives of disconnected, urban youth. SBY oversees several transitional living contracts with DC and federal government specifically for young people who would be homeless otherwise. While it should remain the highest of priorities to secure permanent housing for our clients upon exit from these temporary residential programs, this is a particularly difficult challenge in DC (and several other major cities), especially among teenage and young adult populations, due to gentrification of neighborhoods and high housing costs. And while DC and federal government have been more apt in recent years to embrace new initiatives for permanent housing, we must not lose sight of the urgent and on-going need for emergency shelter and transitional living programs for young people with no where else to turn.

The promotion of affordable housing must be tied to workforce development targeted for DC's poorest communities if we are to have real success in promoting educational and employment opportunities for this city's disconnected youth. Martha Ross and Brooke DeRenzis of The Brooking's Institute's Greater Washington Research Program recently released a report *Reducing Poverty in Washington DC and Rebuilding the Middle Class from Within.* It concludes with several recommendations on how to help the city's low-income residents move into the middle class. Specifically, we need to improve the city's workforce development system and expand our education and training capacity, and the authors argue convincingly for the expansion of sector-specific programs, notably construction training, which would offer a greater number of low-income residents access to good-paying employment. This recommendation mirrors the objectives of our YouthBuild Program, which links GED attainment to building trades apprenticeships. Ross and DeRenzis also demonstrate the wisdom of enhanced programs for residents with low reading and math skills concurrent to employment preparation, as well as supported work for ex-offenders and out-of-school youth.

Third, I am happy to report that recent years in DC have seen an increased commitment to funding community based alternatives to incarceration for juvenile offenders. In DC in 2003, juveniles were committed and detained at a rate of 625 per 100,000. This rate far exceeds any other state in the nation and 90% of these youth were male, and 81% were African American. In 2004, the DC Inspector General released a report highlighting a number of deficiencies with the Youth Service Administration, the agency responsible for juvenile detention and rehabilitation, and recommended that the agency become a Mayoral cabinet level position. Since that time a new Director, Vincent Schiraldi, was appointed to the agency, which was renamed the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS). Since Mr. Schiraldi's appointment there has been a philosophical shift at DYRS, including a commitment to decrease the number of youth incarcerated at the District juvenile facility, Oak Hill, and a greater interest in placing detained and committed youth in community residential and non residential facilities.

In 2005, 1,228 youth were released from secure detention to relatives and non-residential community programs. Given the entrenched staffing and change-resistant bureaucracy of the juvenile justice system in DC historically, this number of releases represents a significant policy and operational shift (there were 1,006 releases in 2003 and 1,135 in 2004, respectively). The increasing number of young people returning post-incarceration to DC communities is consistent with DYRS's new direction and commitment to community placement. In fact, DYRS has developed several new initiatives including a program called REFAM (Return to Families),

which is charged with providing youth with less serious offenses with community-based individualized plans.

Mr. Schiraldi believes that approximately 70% of youth at Oak Hill are confined with nonviolent offences and should be targeted for REFAM. DYRS has also recently begun funding community-based programs to provide Evening Reporting Center and Intensive Third Party Monitoring slots. This nascent movement to fund community alternatives to youth incarceration in DC is a positive one for disconnected youth, their families and our communities. Other cities would be well served to implement similar initiatives for arguably the most disconnected of youth—the so-called "re-entry" population.

There are two additional areas which I believe are urgent. Specifically, we need to do more to prevent dating violence among youth and to urge more positive sexual and social relationships and to provide programs in all major cities which give youth who are drawn into commercial sex work a way out.

There are several federal programs which support homeless and disconnected youth. Yet these programs are small relative to the problems I've described above and they need greater congressional attention. I now would like to make several very specific suggestions for federal policy.

- Increase investment in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to expand housing and supportive services and to intervene and support homeless youth.
- Increase resources to schools through the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Act so that admission, transportation and school supports are provided to homeless youth and children.
- Expand resources for youth aging out of the foster care system through the Chafee Independence Living Act Programs—these programs help find housing resources for foster youth who don't have family ties and often end up homeless after emancipation at 21 from foster care systems.
- Promote cost-saving programs which emphasize alternatives to juvenile incarceration. The Juvenile Justice Delinquency & Prevention Act requires states to have early intervention, prevention programs to divert youth from crime and incarceration, yet there is inadequate funding to establish these programs in many states.
- Pass the Place to Call Home Act, a legislative proposal of the national Network for Youth that is expected to be introduced in Congress in July. The Place to Call Home Act is a comprehensive legislative proposal to prevent, respond to, and end runaway and homeless situations among youth through age 24. Enactment of the bill's provisions will have a decisive positive impact for all disconnected youth, not solely youth experiencing homelessness.
- Increase investment in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. This is a vital account that states use to establish prevention and early intervention supports for families at risk of child removal from the home, and support to homeless families.
- Increase funding and supports for the Youthbuild program so that serious expansion can occur for a model which has proven effective and could do so much more.

**Conclusion:**

The lives of thousands of Washington children and those across the country are impaired by severe poverty, disrupted families, teenage pregnancy, inadequate schools, poor health care and violence. For many children, the consequences of disintegrating families include parental neglect or abuse. Instead of security, they face unsafe conditions in their homes, schools and neighborhoods. Some are abandoned or have little or no adult supervision. Too few of the young people at highest risk for homelessness and family dissolution are offered positive youth development activities which challenge them to achieve their highest potential and to become engaged positively in their communities.

I prepared this testimony this past weekend, during Father's Day. So it was bittersweet to consider this time of national familial celebration while organizing my thoughts on all of the many ways that young people become disconnected and disillusioned. Though it is with sadness and regret, we all must acknowledge the lack of strong and supportive families in our nation's poorest communities as a primary symptom of malaise among the vast majority of our very troubled youth. Whether the manifestations are dropping out of school or homelessness or unemployment, we all should remain mindful that strengthening families is the best way to prevent suffering and social disconnection among our young people.

Engaging entire families—rather than individual youth—in all services and supports whenever possible has been the operational philosophy of Sasha Bruce

Youthwork for three decades. This cannot be over-stated. Through this testimony, I have endeavored to briefly outline the many issues facing troubled youth today, and to offer some recommendations, but I must emphasize the importance of approaching this multi-faceted and complicated problem with a steady eye to engaging entire families in trusting relationships that help them to identify and to build on their competencies. Indeed, we see this strength-based, family-focused approach as key to our success and it should be a fundamental part of any neighborhood-based, local, state-wide or national strategy to helping young people grow into healthy, loving and responsible adults.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much.

Mr. Whitfield?

**STATEMENT OF DECARIO WHITFIELD**

Mr. WHITFIELD. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is DeCario Whitfield. I am 19 years old and I am a student enrolled in the Sasha Bruce Youth Build Program. I came to the Youth Build Program after coming home from jail. I was locked up at the age of 16 for armed robbery. There were a lot of circumstances that led to this terrible time.

I was in high school. I was not getting the attention and assistance that I needed from my teachers. I did not understand any of the lessons, and I was constantly behind in my assignments just because I could not understand. I was scared to go to class because I knew I did not know the stuff. The classes were out of order, the students were running the halls, disrespectful to the teachers and each other. I was roaming the halls, smoking weed to escape the misery of feeling stupid and left behind. I could not wait for the 3:15 bell to ring.

Even though I lived with my grandmother, I did not have guidance at home. Although I was not starving and had a roof over my head, I was not getting attention from my family. My father was doing a 10-year sentence in jail, and my mother was running the streets too often to pay me attention. Her habit kept her busy. I had nowhere to run or turn to for structure. I led myself wherever I wanted to go. I was in charge of my life even though I was not wise enough to make decisions for myself. I lived in the ghetto where I saw people get shot, stabbed, using drugs and getting robbed everyday. It was easy to follow the crew and do the same thing.

After I was released, I was ashamed of the fact that I hurt others. I was sentenced to three years in jail. I was sentenced to a Title XVI sentence, when a 16 year old is being tried as an adult. I was in D.C. Jail, Shelby Training Center in Memphis, Tennessee, and the U.S. Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. I was not going to get an education, a job or any kind of direction and development in these places.

Then one day after serving 2.5 years of my sentence, I came home. I was released to my family, the same family that did not give the guidance that I needed in the first place. I was still on my own again. I knew I needed to make a change. I found out about the Sasha Bruce Youth Build Program while I was in jail. I wanted to get my GED because I did not graduate from high school. I

wanted to be able to get a job so that I did not have to hustle. I knew I needed some kind of skill and training.

I came home on a Friday. Ms. Tara from the Free Minds Reading Book Club called Ms. Kym from the Sasha Bruce Youth Build Program and asked her if I could attend the orientation on the following Monday. I was in. She allowed me to come to the orientation even though I had not tested or interviewed. She took a chance on me, and I am glad.

Now that I am in the program, I feel that I am back on track. Some people feel that they are too old to go back to school to get an education. Youth Build made it possible for me to get a way to get my GED. I also get a chance to go to school and get money at the same time. I do not have to worry about getting to work after being in school all day. I get both in the same place. The environment stays the same. I am allowed the chance to have a regular stable environment.

In my classes, there are smaller amounts of people. I am able to get attention that I never got before. The teachers are respectful and they care about me. I have two teachers who care, instead of one who's all crazy and stressed out.

The counselors are there for me. I am able to get guidance whenever I need it. I can discuss trouble when it comes. Before, I would deal with it in any way I could without any outside help from a responsible adult. I am even able to talk about man stuff. I am able to hear from an adult and not feel like something is wrong with me. This program gave me a way to get back to what is supposed to be normal. I never knew normal. It feels almost strange.

When I am all done with this program, I will have training in a trade that I can use to get a job. I have other skills but they are illegal skills. I can only use them for other types of stuff. I was told that the construction piece could be seen as a means to an end. I have a career counselor to help me with any field I choose to enter. I have not made up my mind yet. I got some help with all that too. My counselor told me to redirect my other skills in a legal profession. Instead of breaking an entering, I could be a locksmith.

Programs for young people like Youth Build need to be everywhere. Not everybody is able to get the right people to help them get back straight. Not everybody who falls off the track is in a place where they get word of the chance to do better, fix the wrong stuff, and make something of themselves.

Without the program, I would be selling clothes at a stand in a mall with no GED or any type of good money. I would be stressed out and feeling stupid still. It would take me a long time to get my GED on my own. It would be a minute before I would be able to figure out that nothing was wrong with me. It would also take awhile to figure out the right things to do. Right now, I have supervision even though I am not on probation. People actually want to know where I am when I do not show up for class. I am responsible for learning instead of ducking the teachers and smoking weed. I even have some pocket change, enough to satisfy immediate needs for a little while. I am doing well and nothing is wrong with me. I am not a crazy kid running the streets.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whitfield follows:]

**Prepared Statement of DeCario Whitfield**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is DeCario Whitfield. I am 19 years old and I am a student enrolled in the Sasha Bruce YouthBuild program. I came to the YouthBuild program after coming home from jail. I was locked up at the age of 16 for armed robbery. There were a lot of circumstances that led to that terrible time.

I was in high school. I was not getting the attention and assistance that I needed from my teachers. I did not understand any of the lessons and I was constantly behind in my assignments just because I didn't understand. I was scared to go to class because I knew I didn't know the stuff. The classes were out of order. The students were running the halls, disrespectful to the teachers and each other. I was roaming the halls and smoking weed to escape the misery of feeling stupid and left behind. I couldn't wait for the 3:15 bell to ring.

Even though I lived with my grandmother, I did not have guidance at home. Although I was not starving and had a roof over my head, I was not getting attention from my family. My father was doing a ten-year sentence in jail and my mother was running the streets too often to pay me some mind. Her habit kept her busy getting her fix. I had nowhere to turn for structure. I led myself wherever I wanted to go. I was in charge of my life, even though I was not wise enough to make decisions for myself. I lived in the ghetto. I saw people getting shot, stabbed; using drugs, and getting robbed everyday. It was easy to follow the crew and do the same thing.

After I was arrested, I felt ashamed of the fact that I hurt others. I was sentenced to three years in jail. I was sentenced to a Title-16 sentence. It's when a 16 year old is charged and sentenced as an adult. I went to DC Detention Center, Shelby Training Center in Memphis TN, and United States Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. I was not going to get an education, a job, or any kind of direction and development in those places.

Then one day after serving 2½ years of my sentence, I came home. I was released to my family; the same family that did not give the guidance that I needed in the first place. I was still on my own, again. I knew I needed to make a change. I found out about the Sasha Bruce YouthBuild while I was in jail. I wanted to get my GED because I didn't graduate from high school. I wanted to be able to get a job so I didn't ever have to hustle. I knew I needed some kind of skills and training.

I came home on a Friday. Ms. Tara from Free Minds Reading Club called Ms. Kym from Sasha Bruce YouthBuild and asked her if I could attend the orientation on the following Monday. I was in. She allowed me to come to the orientation even though I had not tested or interviewed. She took a chance on me. I'm glad.

Now that I'm in the program, I feel that I'm back on track. Some people feel that they are too old to go back to school to get an education. YouthBuild made it possible for me to get a way to get my GED. I also get a chance to go to school and get some money at the same time. I don't have to worry about getting to work after I have been to school all day. I get both in the same place. The environment stays the same. I am allowed the chance to have a regular stable environment.

In my classes, there is a smaller amount of people. I am able to get the attention that I never got before now. The teachers are respectful and they care about me. I have two teachers who care, instead of one all crazy and stressed out.

The counselors are there for me. I am able to get guidance when I need it. I can discuss trouble when it comes. Before, I would deal with it in any way I could without any outside help from a responsible adult. I'm even able to talk about man stuff. I'm able to hear from an adult and not feel like something is wrong with me. This program gave me a way to get back to what's supposed to be normal. I never knew normal. It feels almost strange.

When I'm all done with this program, I will have training in a trade to use to get a job. I have other skills, but they're all illegal skills. I can only use them for other type stuff. I was told that the construction piece could be seen as a means to an end. I have a career counselor to help me with any field I choose to enter. I have not made up my mind yet. I got some help with all that too. My counselor told me to redirect my other skills to use in legitimate professions. Instead of breaking and entering, I could be a locksmith.

Programs for young people, like YouthBuild, need to be everywhere. Not everybody is able to get to the right people to help them get back straight. Not everybody that fell off the track is in a place where they get word of the chance to do better, fix the wrong stuff, and make something of themselves.

Without the program I would be selling clothes at a stand in the mall with no GED or any type of good money. I would be stressed out and feeling stupid, still. It would take me a long time to get my GED on my own. It would be a minute before I would be able to figure out that nothing is wrong with me. It would also take

awhile to figure out the right things to do. Right now, I have supervision, even though I'm not on probation. People actually want to know where I've been when I don't show up for class. I am responsible for learning, instead of ducking the teachers and smoking weed. I even have some pocket change, enough to satisfy immediate needs for a little while. I'm doing good, and nothing is wrong with me. I'm not a crazy kid running the streets.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much for that testimony.

Dr. Mincy is a professor of social policy and social work at Columbia University's School of Social Work.

Dr. Mincy?

**STATEMENT OF RONALD B. MINCY, MAURICE V. RUSSELL PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

Dr. MINCY. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Since many young people between 16 and 24 years old are out of school and out of work, they are not acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to replace today's skilled, educated and experienced adult workers. These young people are called "disconnected youth." To remain competitive in a global economy, it is imperative that Congress act in order to reconnect these young people to school and work. Doing so would also provide an important progress on an important American ideal, namely, inter-generational social mobility. Finally, reconnecting these young people to school and work would save billions of dollars in future welfare, child welfare, unemployment and criminal justice expenditures. For these reasons, I applaud this Committee for holding these hearings, and I am grateful for the opportunity to testify.

I would like to set a big picture here. Between 1980 and 2000, the United States enjoyed two of the longest periods of economic growth this nation has ever seen. That growth was fueled by a steady increase in the size, skills, experience and education of the prime-age labor force. However, over the next 10 years, the prime-age labor force is expected to grow at less than half the pace it did during these prosperous years. Moreover, white workers, who generally have more education and occupational status than black, Latino and foreign-born workers, represented the majority of new workers during this prosperous time, but they will represent just 15 percent of net new workers over the next two decades.

Increases in the fraction of workers with college degrees help to fuel the economic growth of the 1980s to 2000s. However, we are expected to have very slow growth in the number of college-educated workers in the next 10 years.

For these reasons, maintaining our competitiveness demands that we get as much as we can out of every potential worker. However, youth between 16 and 24 years old, who are not in school and not in work, are not obtaining the skills they need to fill the void.

Disconnected youth represent about 5 to 29 percent of all young people between 16 and 24 years old. Estimates vary about how large this population is according to the age at which we are trying to begin these estimates or whether or not the estimates are narrow or broad. Some estimates include younger adolescence down to

age 14. Some include, in addition to being out of school and out of work, women who are not married to students or workers or unmarried mothers. Some estimates rely not just on being out of school and out of work but whether or not someone is a high school dropout in the foster care system or in the juvenile justice system or whether or not someone suffers from long-term unemployment or incarceration.

Due to these variations, most studies estimate the population as being somewhere between 2 million and 10 million youth. Therefore, this population is by no means a drop in the bucket and it really represents an important potential labor force to replace retiring workers that if we do not act, we will lose.

Our tolerance for social and economic mobility is based on the idea that equal opportunity will mean that disadvantaged adults will not have disadvantaged children. However, the characteristics of most disconnected youth belie that. Blacks and Hispanics, particularly those of Puerto Rican descent, are over-represented among disadvantaged youth. The children of high school dropouts are also over-represented as are the children of public assistance recipients.

Not only are the children of the disadvantaged more likely to become disconnected in the first place, but they are also likely to experience recurring spells of disconnection and longer spells. For example, black men who are in this age group, one third of them have disconnection spells of up to two years and 12 percent of them have disconnection spells of up to three years. Someone who has three years of being out of school and out of work is unlikely to be hired by the private sector in the United States. This suggests that the idea of inter-generational mobility is being undermined by this notion of disconnected youth and it is for this reason that it is important for this Committee to act.

I want to then honor my time and the time of the other presenters by pointing out that we have heard of a number of effective programs for disadvantaged youth. Youth Build has been touted a number of times. There is also a CUNY Prep Program, which I discuss in my written testimony, that moves young people from being out of school and out of work to actually enrolling in college.

So, I want to again applaud this Committee for holding these hearings and I look forward to working with this Committee in the future to see that we can address these to a number of different Committees, a number of Federal programs and thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Mincy follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Ronald B. Mincy, Ph.D., Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice, Columbia University School of Social Work**

Because many young people between 16 and 24 years old are out-of-school and out-of work, they are not acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to replace today's skilled, educated, and experienced adult workers. These young people are called disconnected youth. To remain competitive in a global economy, it is imperative that Congress act in order to re-connect these young people to school and work. Doing so would also promote an important American ideal, namely intergenerational social mobility. Finally, reconnecting these young people to school and work would save billions of dollars in future welfare, unemployment, and criminal justice expenditures. For these reasons, I applaud this committee for holding these hearings, and I am grateful for the opportunity to testify.

As compared with the previous two decades, the U.S. labor force is expected to grow much more slowly and we can anticipate substantial shortages of skilled, educated, and experienced workers. The labor force (persons between 25 and 54 years old) grew by almost 50 percent between 1980 and 2000, but over the following 20 years, it is projected to grow by less than 16 percent. Only 15 percent of net new U.S. workers will be native-born whites, who represented over 54 percent of net new workers between 1980 and 2000. Black, Hispanic, and foreign-born workers will replace native born white workers between the ages of 25 and 54 years old, because the number of these prime age white workers will decline by 10 percent 2000 and 2020 (Ellwood, 2001). Since minority and foreign-born workers generally have lower levels of educational attainment and occupational status than white workers, this demographic transition implies declines in the skills and education of the American workforce. There is also direct evidence of such a decline. The fraction of workers with college degrees will increase by about 5 percentage points between 2000 and 2020; during the two decades before 2000 it increased by 11 percentage points (Ellwood, 2001).

Youth who are out of school and out of work are not acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to replace the skilled, educated, and experienced adult workers who will retiring in the coming decade. In the 1990s, observers began efforts to estimate the size and characteristics of these disconnected youth (Besharov 1999 and Donahoe and Tienda 2000). Though we know much more about them, we still lack a coherent national strategy to provide these young people with the supports they need to return to school and work, so that we remain competitive in a global economy.

Definitions of disconnected youth vary by age and other criteria. The most strict definition is a person between the 16 and 24 years old, who is neither working (in the private sector or the military), nor in school. When studying disconnection, some studies consider youth as young as 14 years old because it is clear that the process of disconnection begins before age 16. To take account of gender differences in the transition from youth to adulthood, early studies added teenaged mothers or women who were not married to a student or worker to the definition of disconnected youth (Brown and Emig, 1999). More recent studies also use factors that are highly associated with disconnection by the most strict definition (out-of-school and out of work) as criteria defining disconnection youth. For example, according to Wald and Martinez, (2006) any 14 to 17 year old who drops out of high school, or is involved with the juvenile justice system, or is an unmarried mother, or is in foster care is at risk of disconnection. Moreover, any 18-to-24 year old who experiences long-term unemployment or incarceration is disconnected. Because of these variations in criteria, estimates of the size of the disconnected-youth population vary widely. By the strictest definition, disconnected youth represent about 5 percent of all youth between 16 and 24 years old. By broader definitions, they represent as much as 29 percent of all youth in a given age range. Depending upon criteria, disconnected youth were reconnected to school and work, they could replace a small or more substantial fraction of the skilled, educated, and experienced workers who will retire over the next decade.

Besides replacing skilled, experienced, and educated workers, disconnected youth are evidence that a fundamental American ideal is failing. That ideal is intergenerational social-economic mobility. Our tolerance for social and economic inequality is based on the belief that equal opportunity will make it possible for the children of the disadvantaged to advance beyond their parents' station in life. However, a common finding of studies of disconnection is that blacks and native-born Hispanics, especially those of Puerto Rican descent, are more likely to become disconnected than other adolescents (Brown and Emig 1999, Donahoe and Tienda 2000, and MaCurdy, Keating, et al. 2006). For example, black males are twice as likely to be disconnected as white males, because of their high dropout, unemployment and incarceration rates. In addition to high dropout and unemployment rates, black females are more likely to be disconnected than white females because of their high rates of unmarried births.

Studies also show that race and ethnicity are not the only evidence, related to disconnection, that the American class structure is hardening. Instead, the probability of disconnection is inversely related to parental education and parental receipt of public assistance. So, for example, by age 22 the probability of disconnection for the adolescent children of high school dropouts is more than twice as high as the corresponding probability for the adolescent children of college graduates. What's more the probability of disconnection was 34 percent for the white adolescent children of high school dropouts, but 47 percent for the white adolescent children of high school dropouts, who also received public benefits (MaCurdy, Keating, et al. 2006).

Longitudinal studies, which examine outcomes over time, show that race and parental education are also strong predictors of recurring and longer spells of disconnection. For example, once an initial spell of disconnection is interrupted by a return to work or school, 13 percent of the adolescent children of high school dropouts experience a second spell of disconnection. By contrast, a second spell of disconnection occurs for only 7 percent of the adolescent children of high school graduates and only 4 the adolescent children of college graduates. Only 24 percent of white males had a first spell of disconnection lasting at least two years; while 33 percent of black males did so. Indeed, 12.3 percent of black males had first disconnections spells that lasted three years; only 8.3 percent of black females, 6.5 percent of white males and 4.9 percent of white females had a first disconnection spell of such long duration.

That the incidence, recurrence, and duration of disconnection spells is higher for blacks than whites, does not mean that white youth are immune to disconnection. The majority (58 percent) of disconnected youth are white.

Longitudinal studies of disconnection also providing information that may help policy makers target resources to disconnected youth. As stated above, the adolescent children of public assistance recipients are more likely to become disconnected as are youth in the foster care system and juvenile justice systems. Moreover, the probability of the first spell of disconnection rises steadily with age, but peaks at 18 years old, when most youth should be graduating from high school. Finally, the probability of a second spell of disconnection is higher for youth who began their first spell of disconnection after dropping out of school or being convicted of a crime. These findings suggest strategic points during the life cycle when interventions should be targeting disconnected youth or youth at risk of becoming disconnected. An obvious intervention point is just before youth leave school. Another is while youth (or their parents) are receiving public benefits. Other points of intervention include the period just before youth age out of foster care or after youth have been convicted of a crime, perhaps in programs that divert non-violent offenders from incarceration. Welfare programs and programs serving teen mothers are obvious points of contact for serving disconnected young women. But because disconnected young men are rarely served by publicly-funded programs, unless they are reached in school, foster care, or in the juvenile justice system, it may be difficult to reach them at all.

Reconnecting Disconnected Youth

Promising or effective interventions for disconnected youth are simple to conceptualize, but often difficult to design and implement. They tend to connect youth, to school or work, but they must also create comprehensive systems of support to address barriers to school attendance and employment. The basic model for connecting disconnected youth to school is the alternative high school. Studies show that the most successful such high schools emphasize easy access. They tend to be free of charge and offer schedules that allow young people to handle their personal responsibilities and complete their coursework. The most promising approaches go beyond GED attainment, because studies show that the return to obtaining a GED is substantially lower than the returns to a high school diploma (Campbell and College, 2003). Moreover, these programs have small class sizes, a family atmosphere, a combination informality and structure and individualized strategies are all common in successful transitional schools. Student autonomy and accountability are also stressed in these programs (Dugger and Dugger 1998 and Reimer and Cash 2003). Other features of effective alternative schools include attention to students' psychological needs and efforts to build on student's social as well as their academic skills (Mitchell and Waiwaiole 2003).

CUNY Prep, collaboration between the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), New York City Department of Education (DOE) and City University of New York (CUNY), is a good example of a alternative high school. The purpose of CUNY Prep is to prepare out-of-school students, between the ages of 16–18 years old, to reenter high school or to acquire their GED so they may attend college. With this goal in mind, CUNY Prep works to improve the confidence of the youth as students in a small school setting, where they are held to high expectations. Teachers and administrators work diligently with students to overcome current barriers, such as acquiring daycare for young mothers and housing or other barriers to reentry for ex-offenders. Besides high expectations and supports, CUNY Prep students are also held accountable for their actions. Failure to adhere to rules for student conduct often results in dismissal, although students are allowed to return the following semester with no retributions.

Connecting older youth or young adults to work is a more formidable task for several reasons. Young people between the ages of 18 and 24, usually face more obsta-

cles to work than younger cohorts, attempting to return to school. Many 18-to-24 year-old disconnected youth are high school dropouts. Others graduated from high school despite having limited math and reading skills. Finally, few employers are willing to hire young people with no work experience. Despite these difficulties, there are programs that are successful in introducing or re-introducing these young adults to work.

Many of the characteristic of successful alternative education programs hold true for workforce development programs. However, diversity within the disconnected-young adult population requires multiple pathways to success (National League of Cities, 2000). Such designs often result when efforts are undertaken to include disconnected young adults in program design and implementation decisions.

YouthBuild USA is a nationally recognized program that works with disconnected young people, by creating meaningful employment opportunities in the construction industry. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has partnered with local nonprofit, faith-based and public agencies to replicate Youthbuild in several communities around the country. Constructions jobs not only help the young adults, but also enable these young adults to contribute to their communities by building low-income housing. While learning job skills that will lead to sustainable employment, young adults are also encouraged to complete their high school diploma or obtain their GED at YouthBuild's own alternative school. Consistent with the comprehensive approach needed to work with disconnected youth, Youthbuild also provides social support and follow up services to participants.

More recently, Youthbuild has added several new features to its programming, which should increase success. Through a partnership with AmeriCorps young adults receive monetary compensation while learning new skills, which should increases retention. Additionally, AmeriCorps offers a stipend or a larger educational reward upon completion of the program, which should increase the number of young adults who successfully complete the program. Fifty-eight percent of the youth that enter the program complete it, of those 33 percent obtain their GED or high school diploma and 78 percent go onto to gainful employment or further education.

Financial literacy and leadership development are other new components of Youthbuild's programming. Upon graduation from the program, YouthBuild introduces its graduates to asset development through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) and YouthBuild Asset Trust. After graduation from Youthbuild, participants have the opportunity to engage youth leadership activities. There are a variety of alumni youth leadership organizations for graduates of YouthBuild.

A final example of a promising program for disconnected youth is especially focused on homeless youth and youth in foster care system. The Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunity Initiative (MAYOI) is a is a two year transitional program, sponsored by The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs, targeting foster care youth or youth who have been previously homeless. MAYOI collaborates with local providers ensure these youth receive priority for housing and other social services, including education, health care, employment-training. The goal for participants is to become economically self-sufficient in two years and have their own home within three years.

These are just a few of the promising initiatives that have been developed by governments and non-profit agencies to respond to the needs of disconnected youth. A much more concerted effort is needed in the coming years to build effective systems to support these youth. One of the obstacles to such a system is the multiple jurisdictions involved. Disconnected youth (or those at risk) come from families receiving welfare, the foster care system, and the criminal justice system. We want to ensure that these youth return to school and to work. Though support from the federal government is desperately needed, no single federal departments and Congressional committees can do the job on its own. Nevertheless, I urge Members of Congress to begin with these hearings to work through the obstacles. Our position in the world economy and our commitment to a fundamental American ideal depend on our ability to act decisively, over the 10 years.

**References**

Besharov, D. (Ed.) (1999). *America's Disconnected Youth*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute.

Brown, B.V., & Emig, C. (1999). Prevalence, Patterns, and Outcomes. In D. Besharov (Ed.), *America's Disconnected Youth*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute.

Campbell, L. and College, N. (2003). As strong as the strongest link: Urban high school dropout. *The High School Journal, 87,* 2, 16–24.

Dugger, J.M. and Dugger, C.W. (1998). An evaluation of a successful alternative high school. The High School Journal. 81(4), 218–228.

Donahoe, Debra and Marta Tienda. 2000. "The Transition from School to Work: Is There a Crisis? What Can Be Done?" In Danziger, Sheldon, and Jane Waldfogel (Eds.) *Securing the Future: Investing in Children from Birth to College.* Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY.

Ellwood, D.T. (2001). The Sputtering Labor Force of the 21st Century: Can Social Policy Help?: National Bureau of Economic Research.

MaCurdy, T., Keating, B., and Nagavarapu, S.S. (2006). *Profiling the plight of disconnected youth in America.* William and Flora Hewitt Foundation.

Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2007). *Making My Way Home program overview.* Retrieved on June 17, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.atlcf.org/www/documents/mywayinfo06b.pdf.

Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative. *Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative fact sheet*. Retrieved on June 17, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/docs/mayoifactsheet.pdf.

Mitchell, S. and Waiaiola, G. (2003). Interim Evaluation of In-District Alternative Education High School Programs. Portland, OR: Author.

National League of Cities. (2006). *Reengaging disconnected youth*. Washington, DC: Author.

Reimer, M. and Cash, T. (2003). *Alternative schools: Best practices for development and evaluation*. Clemson, South Carolina: National Dropout Prevention Center.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initative. (2006). Cross-Site Report: Progress on Performance Measures. Retrieved on June 17, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://www.atlcf.org/www/documents/perfreport06.pdf.

Wald, M. and Martinez, T. (2003). *Connected by 25: Improving the life chances of the countries most vulnerable 14–24 year olds*. William and Flora Hewitt Foundation Working Paper.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Ms. Burt is a research associate for the Center for Labor, Human Services and Population at The Urban Institute.

**STATEMENT OF MARTHA R. BURT, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, CENTER ON LABOR, HUMAN SERVICES AND POPULATION, THE URBAN INSTITUTE**

Dr. BURT. Thank you, Chairman McDermott, Congressman Weller and other Members of the——

Chairman MCDERMOTT. I guess I should have addressed you as "Doctor," I am sorry.

Dr. BURT. Thank you. He is a doctor and I am a doctor. Thanks for inviting me to share my views related to homeless youth, and especially their involvement in public systems. I have been involved in policy-oriented research related to homeless populations since 1983 with the First Emergency Food and Shelter Act, and I have also, in addition to working on homeless issues, worked a lot on high-risk youth from a number of different directions, including teenage pregnancy, mental illness and community programs to assist multi-problem youth. So, I take a multi-system perspective, and I take a fairly long—who is getting into the potential place to become homeless among many youth who are at high risk and experience a lot of difficulties.

About a quarter of youth could be put in that category of those who have an elevated risk of homelessness. They are in fact showing up on the streets and the more vulnerabilities they have in the

direction of many of the issues that people have said the higher likelihood that they are—that they will experience homelessness.

I have been asked to talk about how big the problem is, that is how many homeless youth are there, who they are and what might be promising types of intervention. I am not going to talk about who they are because I think you have heard that from everybody else. I have provided a number of statistics about the proportions that we know from research are in—have particular issues, but I will skip that.

I do want to talk about the issue of understanding how big the problem is and why it is so difficult for anybody to tell you the answer to that. The Committee is, at this point, interested in youth 16 to 24. That means you are interested in minors and adults. The same national surveys do not cover both minors and adults, and so we are always in a position of trying to piece together information from surveys that look at youth, like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and surveys that look at adults. In addition, the same systems do not serve both youth and adults. So, for instance, the homeless service system, for which we do have some national data and national estimates that I have included in my testimony, does not take anybody under 18. The Runaway and Homeless Youth system has its own data system and trying to put those together is rather difficult. The foster care system has yet another data system. Trying to figure out where the overlaps are makes it very difficult for us to give you estimates.

It also very much depends on what you mean by "homeless." When you look at estimates of 1.5 million, 1.6, 1.7 million, in the course of a year, is everything from youth who have left without parental permission for one night, so the definition in these telephone surveys is one night on the street without consent and not on vacation, of course, all the way to up kids who have basically been kicked out at the age of 12 because somebody found out or figured out that they were a sexual minority and they have no place to go except on the street from thereon. So, if you are looking at the very hardcore group of kids who have very long histories of homelessness, that is a smaller proportion of kids who have a lot more complex needs and a level of intervention that will be necessary to help them back is a lot higher.

Youth who use youth homeless shelters are most often homeless for the first time and have not been homeless very long. Mostly what we know about them we know because they are connected to the programs run by the Family and Youth Services Bureau and we have a data system on them. Street use is exactly the opposite. They are unattached to shelters, they are on their own without adult supervision for periods that can last for several years. In the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, which I analyzed and published a lot about, we looked at the 18 and 19 year olds because this went only to adult shelters so we have analyzed the 18 and 19 year olds and the 20 to 24 year olds to look at the differences between those age groups and the homeless people over 25, and what you find is that up to 61 percent of the 18 and 19 year olds who are in adult shelters have been in foster care and have aged out of foster care, many have been in correctional institutions and that is where you get your really serious

cases who have very long histories of homelessness, they are already chronically homeless.

In the 20 to 24 year old group, you have a lot of young mothers, who were teenage moms, have all the issues related to being a mother at a very young age, often not voluntarily, and are now turning up as the homeless families, and they are being talked about as if they were not teenage moms, they are just a normal family that was just one paycheck away from homelessness but that is not actually who they are.

I want to actually emphasize very much that the intervention point, there is a general rule of thumb, when you are looking at populations sort of as broad brush as homeless youth and that is to go for the hardest core you can find. If you are going to put significant money into people, people who are in trouble, the ones you really want to touch and touch deeply, intensively, and across the board, are those who have absolutely no chance of getting out of this on their own. Most of the children who go to runaway and homeless youth centers end up in fact reconnected to their families, thanks to the help they get at those places, with not no trouble but not huge amounts of trouble and huge investment in them.

The really hardcore kids, the kids who age out of foster care, the kids who run away from foster care, which is at least as many, the kids who get exited out of foster care before they are 18 because they are now in other institutions, like jails and correctional facilities, these populations are at least as big those that age out. The 200,000 a year who leave correctional institutions between the ages of 16 and 24 also are at very, very high risk for long-term less than productive lives. The most expensive interventions are also the interventions that will rescue the people who are least likely to rescue themselves.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Burt follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Martha R. Burt, Ph.D., Research Associate, Center on Labor, Human Services and Population, The Urban Institute**

Chairman McDermott and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to share my views relating to homeless youth, and especially to their involvement in public systems under the supervision of this committee. I have been involved in policy-oriented research on homeless populations and homeless service systems since 1983, when the first Emergency Food and Shelter Program legislation was passed, and have also spent considerable time trying to understand strategies that are able to reach multiproblem youth and help them move toward a productive and responsible adulthood. So it is a pleasure for me to be asked to give testimony on a matter that has not received either the research or policy attention it deserves.[1]

I have been asked to address three issues: (1) How big is the problem—how many homeless youth are there? (2) Who are homeless youth—what are their characteristics, and what factors predispose youth to become homeless? and (3) What might be the most promising points and types of intervention?[2]

---

[1] This testimony draws on my own and other researchers' published and unpublished work. The views expressed are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization with which I am affiliated.

[2] For a recent comprehensive overview of youth homelessness, see Paul Toro, Amy Dworsky, and Patrick Fowler, "Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Findings and Intervention Approaches." Paper presented at the Second National Homelessness Research Symposium, March 1–2, Washington, D.C., sponsored by Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (DHUD).

How Big Is the Problem?

There are no reliable statistics on the number of homeless youth, in part because this is a notoriously difficult population to find and count, and in part because everyone defines the population differently. This Subcommittee has stated that its interest is in the population of youth and young adults age 16 to 24. This age range includes both minors and adults, which usually means that data must be drawn from different ongoing national surveys just as different systems of public and private support and intervention serve minors and adults. There are also issues of what one means by "homeless"—does one night away from home without permission count, or two nights, or do we want to focus on the youth who truly have no place to go back to and spend years on the streets? Estimates have to be cobbled together from different sources, or special surveys have to be conducted, each of which has its limitations. I am happy to say more about definitional and methodological issues if asked, but assuming the Subcommittee is interested in our best guesses, they are the following:

- For youth age 12–17, two estimates from quite different sources fall in the range of 1.6 to 1.7 million a year (between 7 and 8 percent of all youth in those age ranges). This estimate is at the high end because it is very inclusive, counting short unauthorized absences from home or "throwaway" experiences of getting kicked out for a period of time as well as long-term separation from family or having nowhere to return (Ringwalt et al. 1998; Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak 2002). A higher proportion of episodes occur among older than among younger youth. Further, most of these episodes are very short, with the result that about 300,000 to 400,000 youth might be expected to be homeless on any given day.
- Youth using homeless youth shelters are usually homeless for the first time and have not been homeless long. Information about youth in these shelters, which are usually funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), can be obtained through RHYMIS, that system's management information database. Street youth are the opposite—unattached to shelters and on their own without adult supervision for periods that can exceed several years. Information about this part of the homeless youth population is only available through special studies.
- Homelessness among young adults, age 18 to 24, may be studied within the homeless assistance system that serves adults. Still the best source of that information, although now dated, is the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC), which was conducted in 1996. Urban Institute researchers developed estimates of the homeless population from NSHAPC, from which we can estimate the numbers of 18- to 19-year-olds and 20- to 24-year-olds among the adult homeless population (Burt, Aron, and Lee 2001).
  - 18- to 19-year-olds are 5 percent, or 22,000 to 44,000, of the homeless population on a single day, or about 80,000 to 170,000 over the course of a year.
  - 20- to 24-year-olds are 7 percent, or 31,000 to 59,000, of the homeless population on a single day, or about 124,000 to 236,000 over the course of a year.

Who Are Homeless Youth?

- **Gender**—In shelter samples, whether in youth or adult shelters, the proportions of males and females tend to be about equal. The older and the more "street" the sample, the more males.
- **Race/ethnicity**—As with samples of homeless adults, race/ethnicity distributions depend heavily on the race/ethnicity distribution of the entire community.
- **Sexual minorities**—Research findings on the proportion of homeless youth who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual vary, from a low of about 6 percent from youth-services-center samples to as high as 11 to 35 percent in street samples. Sexual minority status is a powerful risk factor for youth homelessness, as disclosure to a parent or a parent's discovery of that status may lead to being thrown out or running away.
- **Pregnancy**—Homeless youth are three times as likely as national samples of youth to be pregnant, to have impregnated someone, or to already be a parent. Pregnancy may be the result of having no way to obtain money other than through prostitution (survival sex) when already homeless or ejection from home because of the pregnancy. This trend continues for homeless young adults age 18 to 24 (see appendix, table 1).

- **Length of time homeless**—As noted, youth using runaway and homeless youth shelters tend to have been homeless only once and for a short period of time. NSHAPC data on young adults shows that more than half had been homeless for 2 to 9 years. Two-thirds of those age 18 to 19 had first become homeless before they were 18; the same was true for a third of those age 20 to 24 (see appendix, table 1).

Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Youth

In addition to pregnancy and sexual minority status, a number of factors may contribute to a youth becoming homeless and to the separate issue of a youth remaining homeless.

- **School difficulties**—About half of homeless youth have not finished high school, with the proportion going up the younger the youth. Between one-fourth and two-fifths of homeless youth have had to repeat at least one grade in school. Among young adult homeless people, the majority have been suspended and/or expelled from school (see appendix, table 2).
- **Substance abuse**—Thirty to 40 percent of homeless youth report alcohol problems in their lifetime, and 40 to 50 percent report drug problems. These percentages are smaller than for older homeless people, but homeless youth tend to have started younger, often before age 15. This early use and abuse is predictive of serious adult addiction problems and long-term homelessness (of 18- to 19-year-olds in NSHAPC, 23 percent began drinking to get drunk before age 15, and 20 percent began using drugs regularly at that early age) (see appendix, table 2).
- **Mental health problems**—Forty-five percent of homeless youth reported mental health problems in the past year, 50 to 56 percent did so over their lifetime. These rates are not different than for older homeless adults, but they are predictive of becoming homeless and remaining homeless (see appendix, table 2).
- **Family conflict and child maltreatment**—Very high proportions of homeless youth report family conflict as a reason for being homeless. Almost twice as many young adult homeless people report abuse and neglect experiences as do older homeless people (see appendix, table 3).
- **Out-of-home placement and foster care**—Abuse and neglect experiences increase the likelihood of child welfare involvement and out-of-home placement, and life on the street increases the likelihood of criminal involvement.
  - 61 percent of 18- to 19-year-old NSHAPC young adults had been in out-of-home placements—a rate more than two and a half times that reported by homeless adults 25 and older. The 20- to 24-year-old NSHAPC population was in the middle. Further, the younger group was more likely to have been removed from their home before age 13 and to have spent more time in out-of-home placement. Half had been forced to leave home when they were a minor (see appendix, table 3). About a quarter of NSHAPC young adults had been in juvenile detention, compared with 15 percent of older homeless people.
  - The association between child welfare involvement and shelter use as an adult works both ways. Studies in New York City indicate that 29 percent of emergency shelter users had been involved with child welfare services, of whom three-quarters had been placed outside the home (Park, Metraux, and Culhane 2005). Thus, out-of-home placement is a decided risk for homelessness (in the general population, only about 3 percent of adults have been so placed). Looked at from the child welfare perspective, 19 percent of former child welfare service users entered public shelters within 10 years of leaving child welfare. Those placed outside the home were twice as likely as those that just received preventive services to enter a shelter (22 versus 11 percent), while absconders from foster care had the highest rate of subsequent homelessness (Park et al. 2004a).
  - Finally, having been homeless as a child, with one's parent(s), is associated with subsequent child welfare involvement. Eighteen percent of such children became involved with child welfare within 5 years of their first shelter admission, with recurrent use of shelters (i.e., repeated homeless episodes) being a strong predictor of child welfare involvement (Park et al. 2004b).
- **Juvenile justice involvement**—Every year about 200,000 youth age 10 to 24 leave detention and correctional facilities. Most do not have a high school diploma, nor have they ever held a job. They frequently have physical health, mental health, and/or substance abuse problems. And they most commonly go back to neighborhoods that will expose them to the same risk factors for getting

into trouble that put them into the justice system in the first place. Several studies, summarized by Toro et al. (2007), indicate that these youth have high probabilities of ending up homeless.

All the statistics we can assemble suggest that many kinds of trouble may lead to youth homelessness. The very large majority of youth who experience a runaway, throwaway, or homeless episode manage to leave homelessness and not return. But the longer a youth has been homeless, the more likely he or she is to be in many kinds of trouble and to have been for a long time (Toro, Dworsky, and Fowler 2007). Further, the longer the period of youth homelessness is and the more barriers a youth faces, the higher the risk that the youth will end up as a chronically homeless adult. Indeed, many homeless street youth today would meet HUD criteria for chronic homelessness if they were adults.

Intervention Options

A general rule of thumb for selecting among intervention points and intervention types is "go for the hardest-core you can find." Thus, with homeless youth, the largest waste of human potential, along with the biggest costs to society, lies with multiproblem youth, who are quite often involved with two or more public systems and who have the highest risk of becoming and remaining homeless. This may seem counterintuitive, and it is often not politically popular. But a good deal of research indicates that while interventions with the "hardest-core" parts of a population are the most expensive, they also yield the most impact for the investment. This is because these are the people who are pretty much guaranteed *not* to solve their own problems if left to their own devices.

The runaway and homeless youth shelter network, supported and overseen by the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the DHHS, already focuses on the large component of the runaway youth population that potentially has a home to go back to. Follow-up studies indicate that the very large majority of these youth (up to 90+ percent) reunite with their parents, progress to living on their own, or live with friends, but do not continue in or return to homelessness. While expanding the numbers and locations of these programs would always be desirable, such an expansion would not make much difference for the street youth population because very few of the latter population use these programs.

The intervention points that are likely to yield maximum payoff are the periods surrounding institutional release—the 24,000+ youth who turn 18 while in foster care and the 200,000+ youth who leave juvenile or corrections facilities every year are those among the general youth population who have the highest risk of becoming homeless and of staying homeless or reentering institutions if nothing is done to intervene.[3] The period surrounding the end of substance abuse treatment or psychiatric hospitalization is another potentially fruitful intervention point.

Some research on the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (FCIA) indicates that this strategy has promise. The FCIA doubled allocations to states to ease transition from foster care and allows states to use 30 percent of funds to pay for housing for youth older than 18 but not yet 21. Research summarized by Toro et al. (2007, 14–17) indicates that the youth who receive this type of support are less likely to become homeless during the transition period, and are also more likely to be in college, have access to health care, and not be involved in the criminal justice system. Further follow-up interview waves will shed light on whether these differences persist once youth reach age 21.

In Denver, Urban Peak runs two housing programs that address, respectively, the needs of youth aging out of foster care and long-term street youth. The first is a partnership between Urban Peak and the state child welfare department to provide permanent supportive housing for children in or about to leave state custody who are or have been homeless. The second uses HUD funding and local service dollars to create permanent supportive housing for street youth with disabilities, to allow them to stabilize and get their lives together (Burt, Pearson, and Montgomery 2005).

Throughout the country, adult corrections departments are realizing that it is in their interest to partner with homeless assistance networks as well as employment,

[3] A slightly higher proportion of youth who were in foster care at age 16 "exit" foster care by running away (21 percent) as leave care because they reach age 18 (18 percent). Another group comprising 18 percent of those in care at age 16 leave under "other" circumstances, including transfer to juvenile corrections and other institutions (Orlebeke, 2007). These approximately 50,000 additional youth once in the custody of foster care systems are at very high risk of homelessness; they probably also overlap to an unknown degree with the 200,000 leaving correctional facilities each year.

mental health and substance abuse agencies to ease the transition from incarceration to community. This movement is driven by the bottom line for corrections departments—two-thirds of releasees will be back within three years if they do not receive transitional assistance. The return of such a large proportion of releasees is extremely expensive for corrections departments, and they are finally realizing that it is in their interest to do something about it. The same could be happening with juvenile justice institutions and the young adult facilities run by adult corrections departments.

Conclusions

A surprisingly large proportion of youth age 16 to 24 will experience at least one night of homelessness. A much smaller proportion will spend a lot of time homeless, as youth and later as adults. The factors that propel youth toward homelessness are often the same ones that keep them there or that create the conditions for repeat episodes. We do not have much research evidence capable of guiding us toward the most effective interventions to prevent or end youth homelessness. What we do have suggests that we should pick points of maximum leverage, such as when youth are leaving institutional care, and provide "whatever it takes" to ensure that they can avoid homelessness and ultimately transition to lives of self-sufficiency.

**References**

Burt, Martha R., Laudan Aron, and Edgar Lee. 2001. *Helping America's Homeless: Emergency Shelter or Affordable Housing?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Burt, Martha R., Carol Pearson, and Ann Elizabeth Montgomery. 2005. *Strategies for Preventing Homelessness.* Washington, DC: Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Hammer, H. David Finkelhor, and Andrea Sedlak. 2002. *Runaway/Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics.* National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART), October 2002. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Department of Justice.

Orlebeke, Britany. 2007. "Making the Child Welfare System Work for Older Youth." Presentation at Thursday's Child, Urban Institute, Washington, DC, June 14, 2007.

Park, Jung M., Stephen Metraux, and Dennis P. Culhane. 2005. "Childhood Out-of-Home Placement and Dynamics of Public Shelter Utilization among Young Homeless Adults." *Children and Youth Services Review* 17(5): 533–46.

Park, Jung M., Stephen Metraux, Gabriel Brodbar, and Dennis P. Culhane. 2004a. "Public Shelter Admission among Young Adults with Child Welfare Histories by Type of Service and Type of Exit." *Social Services Review* 78: 284–303.

———. 2004b. "Child Welfare Involvement among Children in Homeless Families." *Child Welfare* 83(5): 423–36.

Ringwalt, Chris, James M. Greene, Marjorie Robertson, and M. McPheeters. 1998. "The Prevalence of Homelessness Among Adolescents in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 88(9): 1325–29.

Toro, Paul, Amy Dworsky, and Peter Fowler. 2007. "Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Findings and Intervention Approaches." Paper presented at the Second National Homelessness Research Symposium, March 1–2, Washington, D.C.

**Appendix**

Table 1

**Basic Demographic Characteristics of Young Homeless Clients**

(weighted percentages)

| | Clients Under 20 Years Old (UN=125) | Clients Aged 20 to 24 (UN=217) | Clients Age 25 and Older (UN=2,578) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Percent of All Homeless Clients* | 5 | 7 | 88 |
| **Gender** | | | |
| Male | 44 | 42 | 72 |
| Female | 56 | 58 | 28 |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | | | |
| White non-Hispanic | 42 | 45 | 41 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 42 | 36 | 40 |
| Hispanic | 14 | 19 | 10 |
| American Indian | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Other | 1 | * | 1 |
| **High school graduate or more** | 49 | 49 | 64 |
| **In homeless family or pregnant** | | | |
| Not in a homeless family (not living with own child[ren]) | 86 | 59 | 88 |
| Not pregnant | 85 | 57 | 87 |
| Pregnant | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| In a homeless family (living with own child[ren]) | 14 | 41 | 12 |
| Not pregnant | 14 | 34 | 11 |
| Pregnant | * | 7 | 1 |
| **Urban-Rural Status** | | | |
| Central city | 88 | 66 | 70 |
| Suburban/balance MSA | 7 | 29 | 21 |
| Rural | 5 | 5 | 9 |
| **Age first homeless** | | | |
| Under 12 | 1 | * | 1 |
| 12 to 17 years | 65 | 35 | 17 |
| 18 to 19 years | 35 | 23 | 5 |
| 20 to 24 years | 0 | 42 | 13 |
| 25 or older | N.A. | N.A. | 64 |
| **Years since first homeless** | | | |
| 1 year or less | 42 | 40 | 21 |
| 2 to 9 years | 58 | 52 | 37 |
| 10 years or more | 0 | 9 | 42 |
| **Spent time with family/friends**[a] | 52 | 66 | 51 |
| **Received money from family/friends**[a] | 49 | 34 | 18 |

*Source*: Burt, Aron, and Lee, 2001, *Helping America's Homeless*, , Chapter 5, Table 5.4. Urban Institute analysis of weighted 1996 NSHAPC client data; Ns given at top of table are unweighted (designated "UN"). [a]Within the past 30 days.

**Table 2**
**History of Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Problems Among Young Homeless Clients**
(weighted percentages)

| | Clients Under 20 Years Old (UN=125) | Clients Aged 20 to 24 (UN=217) | Clients Age 25 and Older (UN=2,578) |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Adverse Experience Occurred Before Age 18*** | | | |
| **First Started Drinking** | | | |
| Before age 15 | 32 | 15 | 26 |
| Between age 15 and 17 | 9 | 17 | 22 |
| **First Started Drinking to Get Drunk** | | | |
| Before age 15 | 23 | 11 | 13 |
| Between age 15 and 17 | 12 | 14 | 15 |
| **First Started Using Drugs** | | | |
| Before age 15 | 31 | 12 | 19 |
| Between age 15 and 17 | 17 | 15 | 20 |
| **First Started Using Drugs Regularly** | | | |
| Before age 15 | 20 | 9 | 11 |
| Between age 15 and 17 | 23 | 13 | 15 |
| **Problems in Past Year** | | | |
| Alcohol Problems | 26 | 27 | 49 |
| Drug Problems | 43 | 29 | 38 |
| Mental Health Problems | 46 | 46 | 45 |
| **Problems in Lifetime** | | | |
| Alcohol Problems | 37 | 40 | 65 |
| Drug Problems | 48 | 38 | 60 |
| Mental Health Problems | 50 | 56 | 57 |
| **Less than High School Degree** | 51 | 51 | 37 |
| **Ever Repeated a Grade** | | | |
| One grade | 33 | 33 | 24 |
| More than one grade | 10 | 7 | 6 |
| **Ever Dropped Out of School** | | | |
| Elementary school | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Junior high/middle school | 8 | 16 | 7 |
| Senior high school | 48 | 51 | 42 |
| **Ever Suspended From School** | 72 | 41 | 43 |
| **Ever Expelled From School** | 32 | 17 | 18 |
| **Juvenile Detention Before Age 18** | 23 | 23 | 15 |

*Source:* Burt, Aron, and Lee, 2001, *Helping America's Homeless*, Chapter 5, Table 5.6. Urban Institute analysis of weighted 1996 NSHAPC client data; Ns given at top of table are unweighted (designated "UN").

**Table 3**
**Childhood Neglect, Abuse, and Out-of-Home Experiences of Young Homeless Clients**
(weighted percentages)

| | Clients Under 20 Years Old (UN=125) | Clients Aged 20 to 24 (UN=217) | Clients Age 25 and Older (UN=2,578) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Before Age 18 Someone You Lived With** | | | |
| Left you without adequate food or shelter | 22 | 14 | 12 |
| Physically abused you, to cause physical harm | 33 | 33 | 21 |
| Forced you or pressured you to do sexual acts that you did not want to do | 16 | 21 | 12 |
| **Abuse/ Neglect Combinations Before Age 18** | | | |
| Physical and/or sexual abuse but not neglect | 42 | 40 | 23 |
| One or more abuse/neglect experiences | 51 | 41 | 27 |
| **Before Age 18, Ever Placed In:** | | | |
| Foster care, Group Home, or Institution | 61 | 34 | 23 |
| Foster care | 40 | 18 | 9 |
| Group home | 41 | 21 | 7 |
| Institution | 27 | 13 | 15 |
| **Before Age 13, Ever Placed In:** | | | |
| Foster Care, Group Home, or Institution | 35 | 21 | 13 |
| Foster care | 20 | 18 | 8 |
| Group home | 23 | 13 | 5 |
| Institution | 16 | 6 | 6 |
| **Between Ages 13 and 17, Ever Placed In:** | | | |
| Foster Care, Group Home, or Institution | 54 | 28 | 18 |
| Foster care | 36 | 10 | 6 |
| Group home | 39 | 18 | 5 |
| Institution | 24 | 12 | 12 |
| **Length of Time in Out-of-Home Placement Before Age 18[a]** | | | |
| Less than one week | 6 | 1 | 2 |
| 1 to 4 weeks | 3 | 21 | 5 |
| 1 to 6 months | 6 | 12 | 16 |
| 7 to 12 months | 9 | 6 | 13 |
| 13 to 24 months | 19 | 9 | 12 |
| More than 2 years | 56 | 51 | 51 |
| **Ever Run Away From Home for More Than 24 Hours Before Age 18** | 51 | 38 | 32 |
| **Ever Forced to Leave Home for More Than 24 Hours Before Age 18** | 50 | 36 | 20 |
| **First Time Became Homeless Occurred Before Age 18** | 64 | 35 | 18 |

*Source:* Burt, Aron, and Lee, 2001, *Helping America's Homeless*, Chapter 5, Table 5.5. Urban Institute analysis of weighted 1996 NSHAPC client data; Ns given at top of table are unweighted (designated "UN"). *Note:* Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding. [a] Among homeless clients who spent time in foster care, a group home, or an institution before they were 18 years old.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Dan Lips is an educational analyst for the Heritage Institute—the Heritage Foundation, excuse me.

Dan?

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL LIPS, EDUCATION ANALYST, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION**

Mr. LIPS. Mr. Chairman, Congressman Weller, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for having me here to testify today. My name is Dan Lips and I am an education analyst at The Heritage Foundation. The views that I express today are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

I am here today to testify about the need to improve educational opportunities for children in foster care, and specifically why Federal and State policy-makers should give foster children and their guardians more control over where they go to school. As this Committee knows, the more than 500,000 American children currently in foster care are among the most at-risk in our society. Research shows that adults who were formerly in foster care are more likely than the general population to be homeless, dependent on State services and to be convicted of crimes and incarcerated.

Early warning signs of these problems are evident in the classroom where foster children often struggle. Compared to the general population, foster children have lower scores on standardized tests and higher dropout rates. This is not surprising when one considers the problems that foster children often face in the classroom, such as instability and frequent school transfers, the kinds of things we have heard about today.

Here in Washington, D.C., 40 percent of the children in foster care have experienced four or more placements. Research has shown that across the country home transfers often lead to school transfers since one's school is often determined by one's address. This instability has a damaging effect on a child's academic progress and it also has harmful social effects since a school transfer can mean the end of friendships, social networks and relationships with adults, all of which can be very important for kids in foster care who have unstable family lives.

One way to address this and other problems and to provide better educational opportunities would be to give foster children more control and more options over where they attend school. Offering tuition scholarships, or school vouchers, to children in foster care could yield important benefits. First, a scholarship could provide foster children with stability. A scholarship or choice option could often allow a child to remain in the same school even when he or she changes homes. Second, for other children, a scholarship could provide an option to transfer into a school that offers a better educational experience. Third, a tuition scholarship program could allow students to attend schools that offer specialized services that cater to a foster child's specific needs.

So, what can Congress do to advance this important policy goal? Providing social services and education is primarily the responsibility of State and local governments, not the Federal Government. However, the Congress can take a number of steps to advance this reform initiative and improve educational opportunities for children in foster care. First, Congress should request that GAO compile research on the frequency of foster children's school transfers and the need to improve educational opportunities for children in foster care. Second, Congress should reform the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to allow states to improve educational opportunities for younger children.

Through the Chafee program, states currently can provide education and job training vouchers to foster children who are sixteen years old or older. For many foster children, this assistance can come too late. Congress should give states the flexibility to use funds allocated through the Chafee program to provide K–12 scholarships if State leaders believe this is the best use of funds.

Finally, since the Federal Government has oversight over the District of Columbia, Congress should provide opportunity scholarships to foster children in Washington, D.C. In 2004, Congress created a school voucher program for low-income students in the District. This program has proven very popular with parents and participating families. Congress should expand this program or create a new program to give scholarships to foster children living in the District.

I have expanded on these ideas in my written testimony, but I will honor my time and close by saying: Giving foster children the ability to attend the school of their choice will not address all the problems they face in life or in the classroom but it can give some of our most at-risk kids a chance for a better life. Since they are charges of the State, foster children are, in a sense, "all of our children." We should not be satisfied until every child in foster care has a stable and high-quality education, the foundation for a successful life. Giving foster children school choice would be a promising step toward accomplishing this important goal.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lips follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Dan Lips, Education Analyst, The Heritage Foundation**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Dan Lips. I am an Education Analyst at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

I am here today to testify about the need to improve educational opportunities for children in foster care. Specifically, I will discuss why Federal and State policymakers should reform education policies to provide greater school choice options for foster children.

**Introduction**

The more than 500,000 children currently in foster care are among the most at-risk children in American society. Research shows that adults who were formerly in foster care are more likely than the general population to succumb to poor life outcomes.

They are more likely to be homeless, unprepared for employment and limited to low-job skills, and dependent on welfare or Medicaid. They are also more likely than the general population to be convicted of crimes and incarcerated, to abuse drugs

and alcohol, or to have poor physical or mental health. Research has shown that women who have been in foster care experience higher rates of early pregnancy and are more likely to see their own children placed in foster care.

Many of these problems are at least in part a product of problems in the classroom where foster children tend to have lower educational attainment than their peers. Foster children on average have lower scores on standardized tests and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy and dropout rates. Overall, a synthesis of available research evidence published by the Child Welfare League of America found that, "Almost all of the reviewed studies of those who were in out-of-home care revealed that the subject's level of educational attainment is below that of other citizens of comparable age."

This is not surprising when one considers the many problems and challenges that foster children commonly experience at school. These common problems include instability, persistent low-expectations, poor adult advocacy on their behalf, inadequate life-skills training, and a failure to receive needed special education services.

**Instability and Low Expectations: Root Causes of Poor Educational Outcomes**

One of the biggest problems foster children face is instability. Children in long-term foster care often experience multiple out-of-home placements. For example, here in Washington, D.C., 40 percent of the children in the District's foster care system have experienced four or more placements.

Out-of-home placements often lead to school transfers since where one attends school is often tied to where one lives. For example, the Vera Institute of Justice reports that in New York City between 1995 and 1999, 42 percent of children changed schools within 30 days of entering foster care.

Research evidence suggests that frequent school transfers and disruptions in the learning process can take a toll on a student's development. For example, a study by the General Accounting Office reported that third-grade students who had experienced frequent school changes were more likely to perform below grade level in reading and math or to repeat a grade than were students who had never changed schools.

It is not surprising, therefore, that frequent school transfers would negatively affect foster children. A research synthesis reported that former foster children who experienced fewer out-of-home placements performed better in school and completed more years of education than did others in foster care. A survey of former foster children found that they "strongly believed that they had been shifted around too much while in foster care, and as a result, they suffered, especially in terms of education."

It is clear how instability causes problems. School transfers create gaps in the learning cycle. They force children to adjust to new classroom settings, teachers, and classmates and cause children to lose social networks, peer groups, and relationships with adults—relationships that can be particularly important to foster care children with tumultuous family lives. These changes can exacerbate the emotional instability and unrest caused by the home transfers themselves. Reducing instability for foster children is identified by researchers and advocates as a way to improve the foster care system.

In addition to disruptions in their educational environment, adults formerly in foster care report that the foster system did not encourage high aspirations for their education. One survey found that older youth in foster care have high aspirations and resent others' low expectations. They also reported that they would have benefited from stronger adult encouragement.

**Addressing the Need for Greater Stability, High Expectations and Better Educational Opportunities**

There is no single solution to all of the challenges and problems that foster children face in school and at home. Ideally, every child in the foster care system would become a part of a stable, loving, permanent home with adults committed to nurturing their talents and skills. However, policymakers can embrace measures to alleviate some of the stresses associated with foster care that contribute to lower educational attainment and poor life outcomes.

One promising reform solution would be to provide foster children with more control and more options for where they attend school. For example, offering tuition scholarships—or school vouchers—to children in foster care would be an important step in encouraging greater stability in their education—indeed in their lives—and open the door to better educational opportunities for many students.

In 2006, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, signed legislation to create the nation's first K–12 tuition scholarship program for foster children. Under

this program, approximately 500 foster children will be awarded $5,000 tuition scholarships to attend private school starting in the fall of 2007.

**The Benefits of Providing Scholarships to Foster Children**

A scholarship program for children in foster care, like the new program created in Arizona, could provide a number of important benefits:

- **First, a tuition scholarship could provide foster children with stability.** A scholarship or choice option could allow a child to remain in the same school (whenever geographically possible) even when placed in a new home setting. This could have educational and social benefits. Allowing a child to remain in the same school could prevent disruptions in the learning process. Importantly, it would also allow a child to maintain peer groups, friendships, and important relationships with adults.
- **Second, for other children, a tuition scholarship could allow some children to transfer into schools that offer a better educational experience.** Academic studies have reported that students participating in school voucher programs have improved academically compared to their peers who remain in public school. For example, the school voucher program in Milwaukee has been subject to two randomized-experiment studies that found that students who received vouchers through a lottery made academic gains when compared to their peers who remained in public school. Similar studies of private school choice programs in Charlotte, North Carolina, New York City, and Washington, D.C. reached similar conclusions.
- **Third, a tuition scholarship program could allow students to attend schools that offer specialized services that cater to a foster child's unique needs.** Many schools are unequipped to offer the specialized services that foster children may need. Allowing for greater choice could give families the opportunity to select the most appropriate school for their child. It could also give schools an incentive to specialize, innovate, and deliver the specialized education services that foster children may need, such as counseling, tutoring, remedial instruction, and life skills training.
- **Fourth, a tuition scholarship program could improve family satisfaction and involvement in children's education.** Most foster parents are dedicated individuals who want the best for the children in their care. However, many lack the resources needed to give that child the education that he or she deserves. They need and deserve assistance in creating an environment that will help their child thrive. A school choice program would give foster parents the ability to provide their children a quality education, which would likely improve the foster care experience for both children and parents.

**How Congress Can Help Encourage School Choice for Foster Children**

Providing social services and education, of course, is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments, not the federal government. Indeed states and localities are beginning to embrace the idea of school choice for children in foster care. This idea of providing tuition scholarships is gaining momentum across the country. In addition to the new program that was created in Arizona in 2006, other states are considering legislation to provide school choice scholarships to children in foster care. In 2007, state legislators in at least four states—Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, and Texas—have considered similar initiatives. The American Legislative Exchange Council has created model legislation to provide opportunity scholarships to children in foster care.

However, Congress can take a number of steps to advance this reform initiative and improve educational opportunities for children in foster care:

**First, Congress should request that the GAO compile research on the frequency of foster children's school transfers and the need to improve educational opportunities for children in foster care.** The federal government has the opportunity to work through the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services to study this problem and highlight the need for reform.

**Second, Congress should reform the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act to allow states to implement programs to improve educational opportunities for younger children.** The Chafee program provides funding grants to states to assist older foster youth and former foster children in the process of attaining independence in adulthood. For example, through the program, states can award "education and training vouchers" to older youths (age 16 and older) who are aging out of the foster care system.

However, the education aid offered by the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act may come too late in many cases because it targets foster children 16 years old and older. Foster children throughout the K–12 education system have a number of unique needs. Providing education choice and flexibility to younger students could provide them with a more solid educational foundation, helping them to achieve academic success, social stability, and adult self-sufficiency. Congress should give states the flexibility to use funds allocated through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to promote K–12 education options for younger children in foster care if state policymakers believe that this would be the best use of funds to prepare foster children for independence in adulthood.

**Third, since the federal government has oversight over the District of Columbia, Congress should provide opportunity scholarships to foster children in Washington, D.C.** In 2004, Congress created a school voucher program for low-income students in Washington, D.C. This program has proven very popular with parents. All of the program's 1,800 scholarships are currently subscribed. And, in all, 6,500 children have applied for scholarships. A recent evaluation of the program conducted by Georgetown University researchers found that the parents of participating students were very satisfied with their children's experience in the program and have become more involved in their education.

There is good reason to believe that many more children would benefit from opportunity scholarships, including the approximately 1,800 school-aged children in foster care living in Washington, D.C. Congress should expand the existing Opportunity Scholarship program to allow more children to participate, and it should expand the eligibility requirements to ensure that all foster children can participate. As an alternative, Congress could create a new program that specifically focuses on providing opportunity scholarships for children in foster care in Washington, D.C.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that giving foster children the ability to attend a safe and high quality school of choice will not address all of the problems they face, but it can give some of our most at-risk children in our society a chance for a better life.

Consider the words of Lisa Dickson, a former foster child, who graduated from high school and went on to succeed in college and graduate school. Ms. Dickson, now an advocate for foster children, wrote an essay "What the Arizona Foster Voucher Program Would Have Meant to Me":

"As I look back on my experience in foster care, educational vouchers would have benefited me if they had made it possible for me to attend one high school, rather than five. I don't know that I would have chosen a private school, rather than a public one. I do know that I never received college preparatory counseling at any of the high schools I attended. I also know that having one teacher and one textbook, and perhaps also some individualized tutoring, would have helped me to master algebra. There was no individualized educational attention given, at home or at school, to any of the teenagers from the group homes where I resided. No special tutoring was made available to foster youth who were failing their classes."

Since foster children are charges of the state, they are, in a sense, all of our children. We should not be satisfied until every child in foster care has the opportunity to have a stable and high quality education that prepares him or her to succeed in life. I believe creating a voluntary, school choice scholarship program for children in foster care is a promising step toward accomplishing this important goal.

Mr. Chairman, I'd again like to thank you for the opportunity to testify about this important issue today. I look forward to your questions.

---

The Heritage Foundation is a public policy, research, and educational organization operating under Section 501(C)(3). It is privately supported, and receives no funds from any government at any level, nor does it perform any government or other contract work.

The Heritage Foundation is the most broadly supported think tank in the United States. During 2006, it had more than 283,000 individual, foundation, and corporate supporters representing every state in the U.S. Its 2006 income came from the following sources:

| | |
|---|---|
| Individuals | 64% |
| Foundations | 19% |
| Corporations | 3% |
| Investment Income | 14% |
| Publication Sales and Other | 0% |

The top five corporate givers provided The Heritage Foundation with 1.3% of its 2006 income. The Heritage Foundation's books are audited annually by the national accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche. A list of major donors is available from The Heritage Foundation upon request.

Members of The Heritage Foundation staff testify as individuals discussing their own independent research. The views expressed are their own, and do not reflect an institutional position for The Heritage Foundation or its board of trustees.

---

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you very much. I'd like to thank all the witnesses for your testimonies and they will be entered into the record. I would like to ask a couple of questions beginning with Jewel and Mr. Whitfield. You talked about living in your home, we are talking about disconnectedness, and if you are living in your car over several different periods, and you are living in a house where you did not have anybody who seemed to be running your life or trying to organize your life, who reached out to you? Or, did you reach out and were rejected by the system? Did you try to leave and go to a more stable situation? You said you were sick, how did you deal with the system out there? I would like to hear what goes through a kid's head when they are out there and looking at the system and knowing they need something, but what happened to you?

Ms. KILCHER. Go ahead.

Mr. WHITFIELD. Actually, I used to be a foster kid when I was younger, and I was in the system for about two years. I came home with my family because they had rehabilitated over the course of the time, the environment that I was in, like the neighborhood, so I began to hang outside with the neighborhood crew so at that particular time my family, they just started like pushing away or whatever. I went to jail for a juvenile case. When I was released, the foster care people dropped the case that they had or whatever with me, so I just felt like my friends are all I have, which makes you feel bad.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Okay.

Jewel?

Ms. KILCHER. I was never in foster care. I did not like adults, I did not really trust adults and had never seen an adult give you something without wanting something. So, I stayed away from any institution possible. I just tried to not make friends, but just really keep to myself. I was not aware that there were programs. Hearing the congresswoman speak earlier, I wanted to camp out on her lawn, I liked her so much. I did not know people like that existed. There was a doctor when I was sick, I was turned away from all the emergency rooms, but one doctor would not see me but he gave me the card of a doctor. That doctor ended up just being a very nice man who actually did not try to have sex with me and treated me. He ended up being the one that helped to get medicine that I could not afford.

I think had I known about programs, there is sort of this stigma that there are kids out there and they are just tough. Well, kids do not want to be tough, kids want to be loved. If you give any of us a shot, we will respond. Looking back and being able to come through what I have come through, I think I am a much stronger and more dependable, more loyal person than most people who I

know who have been through less, but it was because I was sort of given a shot by one or two people that actually had kindness. I had a song called "Hands," and the line in it is, "In the end, only kindness matters" because institutions did not change my life, but kindness did.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. How do we set up the situation for adults to go out looking for youngsters in a way that they can get them in?

Dr. MINCY. Thank you for the question. I think the big picture is that I deal with college students all the time. They are protected in a way, they are there for an academic purpose, but they have personal glitches and when they do, there are counselors, there are health care providers, there is a system to care for them, to keep them not only on their academic track but also to help them when they get off track.

I think the big thing we need to hear about disconnected youth is that there is no system because they are out of school and out of the workplace, they are not on any basic track but when they encounter problems, there is no track for them. The whole field of youth development, the field that is working to reconnect them, has to rely upon funding streams that come from very different agencies with very different rules. It also has to rely upon funding from sometimes public donors, sometimes private donors and all of that funding is fickle. So, what you are hearing is a non-system. Whether we happen to encounter disconnected youth in homelessness or incarceration, that is not the real answer.

The point is that when young people are out of school and out of work, there is a non-system for them, and we need to figure out how to reconnect and how to create something that feels comprehensive and seamless when young people are off track, and there are a lot of them. It is not only a social justice, antipoverty purpose, it is that we need these young people as workers and how can we work together to make sure that there is a more coherent system for them?

Chairman MCDERMOTT. With the goal to return them to their families?

Dr. MINCY. Not necessarily. We are talking about young people who are between 18 and 24 years old with a goal to help them transition to adulthood like your children and mine.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. When do you stop trying to send them home, how old?

Ms. KILCHER. I did not want to be sent home, I think most children, would be home otherwise. If their homes were great, they would be there. I would not suggest sending them home in general but that is just me.

Ms. SHORE. I would like to say though that the programs that do exist are very effective, although small. We see 1,500 young people a year and when you say, "How do we make that connection," we do it in all kinds of ways. There is an outreach van, there is the Safe Place Program that we participate in also, so that every single firehouse in the city has a sign and urges young people to go in. We go to high schools, but this is a constant process because you are talking about every year there are 10 and 11 year olds that

have not heard about the programs. So, you continually need to be reaching out and making those connections.

There certainly are not enough services and there certainly is a lot of disconnection. I do want to say that I think that the nascent services that exist in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs are very good, they are solid. There is a lot of effort, at least I know in our program, to identify the kids that can go home and do the necessary work with the families so that they can in fact return or to identify when that really is not a likely possibility because families have come apart in many cases. We have to recognize that there is another whole set of young people here that are older, that the foster care system is not interested in taking in and whose families are dying or so sick that they really cannot take care of them or in jail. There is a whole group of young people that I think have not really been touched on yet but need to get added as well.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. We may not get it all done today. That is what you are telling me, right?

Ms. SHORE. No, but I think that we should recognize that there is some hope in that there are things that are working, that we already know about, we have the technology for, we just need to really have the will to expand them, to say this is essential.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. I move to Mr. Weller. Mr. Weller?

Mr. WELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is an important hearing, and I appreciate your organizing this. I think we have heard some very helpful testimony from a variety of people before the Subcommittee this morning. I have a number of questions. To begin, I am very uncomfortable calling someone by their first name.

Ms. KILCHER. Kilcher is my last name.

Mr. WELLER. Ms. Kilcher, just to be polite, one of our witnesses in a previous hearing when we were looking at child poverty, Isabelle Sawhill with the Brookings Institution, which is a research institution here—a respected one here in Washington, testified that those who finish high school, work full time, and only have children after getting married are more likely to live out of poverty and in the middle class. That is a common message we see as we study lifting families, and particularly kids, out of poverty. You have achieved success, clearly in listening to your story, the hard way. I admire you and your ability and the challenges you have had to achieve the success that you have had.

Mr. WELLER. Do you have a high school diploma?

Ms. KILCHER. Yes, sir.

Mr. WELLER. After you moved out of your family household, did you continue your education even though you were living outside of the house?

Ms. KILCHER. I did not continue my education. It was really difficult going to high school. I was still paying for tuition to go to the school I was going to.

Mr. WELLER. You were going to a special academy?

Ms. KILCHER. Yes, I had a partial scholarship.

Mr. WELLER. Okay, so while you were living out?

Ms. KILCHER. While I was homeless, yes, I went to a private art school.

Mr. WELLER. While you were homeless, you went to a private school. Your peers, your friends, you talked about some of the other girls, were they still in school?

Ms. KILCHER. As I mentioned, I probably went to nine or 10 different schools in my life so I did not really have normal friends. I moved on every three to six months. While I was homeless and working, I did not really make friendships but I tried to stick up for people if I could. I remember getting fired from one job, my boss asked me to pose for a nude calendar, and he did not mind that I would not, but then he tried to get a girlfriend of mine to pose for it and she was just scared. He could see that weakness in her eyes, and he kept pushing her, and I just stuck up for her and he ended up firing both of us.

Mr. WELLER. Were they still in high school?

Ms. KILCHER. She was trying to go to school. Yes, most kids I have seen really are trying. They really want to. They are trying to hold jobs or trying to——

Mr. WELLER. Who influences, obviously there is a culture at this age, the values?

Ms. KILCHER. It is random.

Mr. WELLER. Do they receive them from entertainment, do they receive them from reading the paper or where do they receive their general values, whether it is pro-education or attending school or working or trying to better themselves?

Ms. KILCHER. It is a really random thing to see whatever is able to come into your life that gives you hope. Some days it would just be something like the kindness of a stranger giving me $5. I did not know anybody that was telling me about these programs. If I had, I would have been very interested but I just did not happen to come across any kind of grassroots, word of mouth thing that spread the worth.

Mr. WELLER. Now, you are an entertainer, right?

Ms. KILCHER. Of the singing variety.

Mr. WELLER. You are a songwriter, you sing, and you do a lot of things but do you feel that for young people that the message that is coming from entertainment, whether it is music or going to the movies or watching movies or video, is pro-education, is encouraging them to further their education?

Ms. KILCHER. Oh, there are all kinds. The reason I think I was able to be successful was people identified with certain kind of longing I had and a certain kind of passion and it helped other people feel better, but that was just my music.

Mr. WELLER. Are they listening—when they are listening to music, are they receiving a message that is pro-education and encourage them to go back to school?

Ms. KILCHER. It depends on the artist. For some it is an aphrodisiac, some it is an escape. There are different purposes for different styles of music.

Mr. WELLER. For young people, entertainers do have a significant influence. We can all admit to that.

Ms. KILCHER. Yes, I would say——

Mr. WELLER. Do you think they have a responsibility to encourage education?

Ms. KILCHER. Every person has the responsibility to try and be the best person they can be. You cannot put that to bear on any one person better than they can bear it.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you. Mr. Lips, you were here for Congresswoman Bachmann's testimony and she was talking about the challenge with the 23 foster children that she had and the experiences of trying to ensure they had a good education and the experience of children changing schools and the rules of existing programs. Even though her children were attending, I believe, a parochial school or a private school, the rules prohibited them, if they could afford it, from enrolling the foster kids in the same school as their biological kids. Can you outline some of your thoughts about what some solutions are to maybe help give those young people more of an opportunity?

Mr. LIPS. Thank you, Congressman Weller. I was really impressed by Congresswoman Bachmann's remarks. The idea of providing every child with the opportunity to attend a school of choice is a really simple way I think to improve their lives. Last year, Arizona created a program to offer school vouchers to children who have been placed in foster care. It was signed into law by Governor Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, and it is going to begin serving children this fall, about 500 kids will receive scholarships. If Ms. Bachmann had lived in Arizona, she would have been able to apply this program and choose the right school for her child. It could be a public school, it could be a charter school or it could be a private school. I think that this is a very simple and small way to make a difference in these children's lives, either by keeping them in the same school, a focus of stability, or by offering a new opportunity that would improve their lives.

Mr. WELLER. I have read where it takes children months to readjust if they go from one school to another, to make new friends, develop peers, and hopefully end up in the right crowd. Would this type of program, say if someone is in a foster program in the same city and there is a family providing them a home but they are on the other side of town, would this type of program allow them to continue to go to the school elsewhere in the city they were previously attending so they could continue to be around their friends and the relationships they currently have?

Mr. LIPS. Absolutely, that is the purpose. We see that school transfers can lead to learning setbacks and emotional setbacks. A scholarship program like this would allow a child to remain in the same school, whether it is a public or charter or private school as one focus of stability in an otherwise often unstable life.

Mr. WELLER. Last, Congresswoman Bachmann referred to the situation when she and her husband were interested in enrolling their foster children in the same private school where their children attend and their foster kids were asking for that opportunity but the rules of their program prohibited them. Can you explain what those rules are, are you familiar with those?

Mr. LIPS. I am not familiar with the exact laws in Minnesota. I would suspect, I believe that that State had an open enrollment law, which would require the child to attend any public school in the area but it would certainly limit the option of choosing between a public and private school, which it sounds like Congresswoman

Bachmann was looking to do. I think that this is why we should offer a full range of choices. These kids are so at risk. Anything we can do to give them a leg up would be really important and beneficial, I believe.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you. You have been generous with time, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you. Mr. Meek?

Mr. MEEK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had to step out for a moment, but I did get an opportunity to hear from most of our witnesses that are here. It is interesting because in my district back in Miami, I represent Miami and South Broward County and South Beach on the weekends, I would admit to that.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MEEK. Anything to help the economy, but, in all seriousness, I had an opportunity to hear from all of you. I am glad that you recognized the increase in funding, that we are trying to move in that direction here in this new Congress.

I wanted to ask, and this is a general question for the panel, as it relates to at-risk youth and the funding that we are talking about and the programs that are on shoe-string budgets, working with what they have, in this time of pay-as-you-go, as we are looking to bring the budget into balance, what are some of the arguments we can use as Members of Congress? We do not have a day like this everyday in Congress where we have real people that come and share real experience with us and for us to make real decisions and follow through on it several months down the road.

What are some of the reasons why Congress should invest even further in making sure that not only young people have options where their lives have not been what you may read in a storybook or you may see a usual kind of situation, you go through a K through 12 experience and then you move on to higher education and then you get a post-graduate degree and then you move on to this great, wonderful job, it is not like that for everyone, and we do understand that. How do we tell that story beyond this Subcommittee on the reason we should not only increase funding but also target the very young adults, when we talk about young adults, those that are over 18, how do we target them, how do we carry this story forward?

Ms. KILCHER. I would say three things spring to my mind, if I may. One is it saves money in the long run. There have been a lot of studies done on if you can help kids get an education now, that they are going to stay out of the system later. If you can give them help now, we would like to stay out of being arrested and those things if you can give us a legitimate way to make money and many of us were willing. I forget what the numbers are, but I do know it saves money in the long run to try and help kids at a younger age stay out of the system.

Also, throughout history, some of the greatest achievers of any society have come from unlikely places. I think that homeless kids have a lot to give if you can see what treasures their minds are. They are not disposable and often can contribute more than a lot of what I would call somewhat—kids that were well off that sometimes became lazy in the system because of the luxury of being

lazy. Then, thirdly, I would say that it is—I forgot my third point, I am sure someone else will have a good one.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MEEK. As we start to go down answering my question, Mr. Whitfield, I know that you were sharing with us, and, Dr. Burt, I want to make sure that we get to you next, but, Mr. Whitfield, I want you thinking about some of your experiences and how you deal with these issues because I will tell you that I have family members that have had similar events in their lives, maybe not just the same, but similar events where they were challenged and fell into this whole unemployable, folks do not want to take the risk or take the chance and giving someone an opportunity, what are some things that we need to what we call in Washington "stay the course" on these issues? All of you on the panel and, Mr. Chairman, "you had me at 'hello'" on this issue, but I think it is important that we are able to give life to it beyond this Committee. Obviously, we sit on this Subcommittee, we have some interest in this subject area. So, I am going to get to you, Mr. Whitfield, because I thought you had a very revealing testimony, and I am glad that you are here today.

Dr. Burt?

Dr. BURT. Oh, thank you. Well, I just wanted to say that the basic argument is that you cannot afford not to in two senses, one is that, as Dr. Mincy had said, and I am sure he has a lot more statistics on it than I do, basically right now we are throwing away about a quarter of every youth cohort that comes along. Twenty-five percent at least do not graduate from high school and many of those that do, do not have any real functional capacity to be operating at the level of jobs that will allow them to actually be self-sufficient. A little bit fewer than those but still a very significant number who drop out and so on, we cannot afford to throw those people away as workers. Number two, we cannot afford what happens to them and what we need to pay for when they end up in the criminal justice system, when they end up in the mental health system, when they end up in such so-called substance abuse systems. We just cannot afford it. We are paying one way or we are paying the other, and it makes much more sense to be investing in them to be productive citizens than not.

That gets me back to a point that I wanted to make an earlier question, which is really in addition to investing in those who we have already failed in a lot of ways, it is really, really important to recognize that you can often tell who is going to be in trouble when you look at first graders and you realize that they are not being taught to read.

So, we just had a story in The Washington Post a couple of days ago about Philadelphia turning its schools around and really focusing on making sure that nobody gets out of first grade without knowing how to read. We have evaluation reports on very, very large mechanisms, such as Success for All, Comer Schools. We know how to make sure that kids get off on the right track when they are in school, and especially focusing on the ones who are least likely to succeed because of their home environments. So, both that very early investment is really important as well as the argument that you cannot afford not to.

Mr. MEEK. Mr. Whitfield?

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Mr. Whitfield, do you have anything to add to this?

Mr. WHITFIELD. I think that there should be more summer jobs out there like something to keep the youth occupied and things to do during the school year too, after school or whatever, so it would give people less time to just loiter around, to keep them occupied 24/7.

My second one is the youth out there with a lack of education, I think that it should be GED programs, more ways for them to get some type of education, and for them to be able to have some type of financing for themselves or whatever so they can really support themselves and do not have to look toward the street corner to make money. I think that stops a lot of people from going to school right there because when you are in high school, you want to dress properly. If you do not have the type of money to dress properly, people "clown" you or whatever, do things like that, so I think there should be more ways for them to be able to finance themselves, have financing.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you. Mr. Lewis?

Mr. LEWIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, let me thank you so much for holding this hearing. I think a hearing of this nature is needed now more than ever before. I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here. Jewel, as someone who knows what it is to be young, homeless, you never gave up, you never gave in, what pushed you? I missed the earlier part of your testimony, but I read it and do you have a message that you can send to other young people through your music or through your words?

Ms. KILCHER. Yes, I have tried to always let my lyrics represent what I have tried to struggle for in my own life in hopes that it helps people. I think that every child feels innately that there is a special spark in them, and you should not be thinking about that, you should just be thinking about having fun.

At the most fundamental levels, when you are so concerned with surviving to the point where you are trying to figure out where your food and where your sleep and your shelter is going to come from, the thing I tried to foster most was just to try not to let that little spark die, whatever that is in every child. Every child really feels they have. The only time I saw kids lose the battle on the streets is when they stopped feeling that spark. Sometimes the smallest act would help me feel good about humanity and other times it was genuine large acts of kindness, like a doctor helping you for no reason when you have no money.

I cannot say what inspires some kids to find help and others not. I cannot tell you the difference in what that is, I just know that I met more kids that were willing to do anything for the words "I love you" than not. I have never really honestly met a "bad seed," maybe one, that you would genuinely call somebody that was genuinely hard to even get through to. So, it is hard for me to answer your question, I am not sure why I continued, but I know that the resilience of youth has shocked me perpetually.

Mr. LEWIS. So, you are suggesting to the Committee and to all of us that there is something within all human beings, young,

whatever, that "spark" you call it, the "spirit" or whatever that is there, I am not going to let it fade away or go away and will continue to push?

Ms. KILCHER. I think ultimately that is what we are all trying to nurture through education, through trying to give you a support system for money, all of that, you are trying to—that is why we are all here, it is humanity.

Mr. LEWIS. So, since we have you here, there is a little gospel song that says something like, "We fall down but we get up," but we do not get up alone, we need help. We need Youth Build, we need Job Corps, we need the intervention of the Federal Government.

Mr. Whitfield, coming in contact with jail, jail is not a pleasant place to go. Some of my colleagues know that when I was much younger, I went to jail a few times but it was fighting for civil rights. I got arrested and went to jail 40 times. This weekend, I went to visit a young man that was in jail in Georgia, 21 years old, probably one of the smartest human beings I ever met.

Did you learn something, do you have a message for your peers and for others that you can say jail is not a good place, prison is not a good place and that you can do better, you can come out whole?

Mr. WHITFIELD. My personal experience with jail, it kind of like—I do not prefer, I do not suggest no one to go to jail.

Mr. LEWIS. I would not, either, it is not a pleasant place, it is not a good place.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WHITFIELD. I prefer telling them, "Stay away from it" because it just builds up inside of you like you are not able to do your everyday routine. It is like you are under a time schedule. A lot of stuff going in between the time schedule, your peers, the staff that run the facility, it just builds up in the inside of you and just makes you mad. So, I do not know how to break it down to the smallest terms.

Mr. LEWIS. I think you are breaking it down just fine. Do you have a relationship with your grandmother today, do you talk with her?

Mr. WHITFIELD. Oh, most definitely.

Mr. LEWIS. She is encouraging and telling you to go——

Mr. WHITFIELD. Most definitely. Now that my family pretty much sees me in this path of straight success, they are pulling into me, they are coming into me. First, I think they did not have too much faith in me when I was coming up because of the places that I chose to go and people I chose to hang around, so they kind of like pushed me away. So, now that they see I am doing something positive with myself, it is like they are coming into me now. The family stopped using drugs, things are pretty much getting better now that they see me doing something positive on myself.

Mr. LEWIS. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Thank you. Mr. Herger will inquire?

Mr. HERGER. Thank you. Mr. Whitfield, we are proud of you.

Mr. WHITFIELD. Thank you.

Mr. HERGER. Needless to say, you can see how proud we are of you, Jewel. You are really in a position, really both of you are

in positions to be role models for others. It is great to see what you have done, the fact that you have rolled up your sleeves and gone after it and made good decisions. We all make some not-so-good decisions periodically during our lives, what is important is that we can correct them.

Mr. Lips, I am interested particularly in some of what we heard. We also heard from Congresswoman Bachmann on the importance of education and how people get stereotyped in these classes where they go. I forget the term she used, the "dumb math class," for the "dumb kids" or whatever, how easy that is to have that happen. Could you tell me how foster children are impacted—a little bit different, but I would like to get around to that also—by the special education system and are students receiving the services they deserve or are they being under-served?

Mr. LIPS. Thank you, Congressman Herger. On that first issue, this is a problem, low expectations is a problem that we hear a lot about. There have been many focus groups of youth—of adults who were formerly in foster care, and that is one of the problems that they commonly identify, that people did not expect much of them, and they were shuffled into the back of the class and were not given the right opportunities. This is a really important question—important problem that we should consider as we are designing policies and try to address.

On that second issue that you mentioned of special education, this is really important for foster children. Research shows that between 30 to 40 percent of the children in foster care also are eligible for special education services. I believe Congresswoman Bachmann mentioned that all of the kids that she took in had IEPs. If you are being shuffled around from school to school, transferred, your paperwork gets lost, you get shuffled through the system, and there are many stories of kids either being under-served, not receiving the special education services that they deserve or being over-served, kids who could otherwise be benefited by being in the mainstream, being shuffled into special education classes.

This is a reason, again, why we could benefit by providing foster children with school choice options. There is a great program in Florida called the McKay Scholarship Program that is specifically tailored for special needs students. It is helping 16,000 kids, the approval rating or I should say satisfaction rates among parents is above 90 percent. It is a great thing and it is getting these kids the services that they need. It is a model that we should look to, and thank you.

Mr. HERGER. Thank you, Mr. Lips. Mr. Whitfield, I am sorry I had to step out for a while, but I did hear your testimony and I am sure it is so very characteristic of so many. I believe you mentioned how you were in school, you had fallen behind, you were going to classes, you really did not feel good at classes because you did not know how to answer the questions.

I remember an experience I had myself when I was a junior in high school. I was in a math class, a higher math class, and I had the flu for a couple of weeks, and I was out and I was never able to catch up again. I had a very bright teacher who probably should have been teaching at Berkeley rather than at our high school, but I was not able to catch up and, boy, that feeling of being lost and

hating to come to class when you just do not seem to be able to get it.

Yet, it is amazing with assistance, with help, somebody working with you, that you can catch up, you can do what you need to do and you can do well. So, again, I want to commend you.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and the ranking member for putting this hearing together. This is so incredibly important. We have so many young people that are being lost between the cracks, great lives that are just so lost out there and if there is anything we can do, we should be doing. There are many role models, we are seeing here today, with the two of you who have been involved, and also, again, I am so touched with our new Member of Congress, Michele Bachmann, on the story with 28 or 29 that she has raised. We raised nine that were ours, and we thought that was a lot, I cannot even imagine 28 or 29, but yet there are people who are doing that. I know another family out where I live in Chico, California that has done the same type of thing. These are very gifted people to be able to do that, but yet we need to do it in every way we can. So, again, I thank you very much.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. I cut Mr. Meek off from his time, I give you one minute.

Mr. MEEK. Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to make a last closing comment, and I want to thank not only you, Mr. Chairman, but also the full Committee Chairman, Mr. Rangel, because I know this is something that we have talked about in closed quarters, about what we should do now that we have the opportunity to do it. I just want to give words of encouragement to not only Jewel but Mr. Whitfield, who came and opened their lives up in a way that I know they have done before but probably never before Congress. Being one, I have dyslexia, and being able to talk with people, Charles Schwab and Danny Glover and I did some of the similar things that you are doing now, talking about our learning disability and how it affected us as we grew up and how we deal with it as professionals.

I want to let you know that your purpose here today, both of your purposes, your story of talking about your indiscretions, what you have done, your story of being homeless and washing your hair and how people judge you, but I say to both of you how do they like you now that you're here, that you are sharing not only before the greatest democracy on the face of the earth, your personal story to help others. So, I want to commend both of you for holding the ladder in place to allow others to climb up.

Mr. Chairman, I think this is a good day to be in Congress and to be in this room to see these two very great Americans share their stories and open their lives and to the professionals that are working in the field helping people, I want to let you know if it was not for you, there would be no us, those of us who need the assistance, and we appreciate you for being in the field. That is all I wanted to stay, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to working and for progress on this issue as we continue to tackle issues that come before this Committee.

Thank you.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Mr. Weller has a unanimous consent.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This has been an interesting hearing, and I just want to ask unanimous consent to include in the record some additional information from several respected groups. The first is a summary of how many youth drop out of high school titled, "Every Nine Seconds in America a Student Becomes a Dropout." This was prepared by the non-partisan American Youth Policy Forum based on a number of studies. The second is a fact sheet put together by the Casey Family Programs based in Seattle, Washington about educational outcomes specifically for children in foster care. Third and last is a statement about the need to promote educational success for young people in foster care, which was put together by the National Foster Youth Advisory Council. I ask unanimous consent to include these as part of the record.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. Without objection, so ordered.

[The provided material follows:]

# Every Nine Seconds in America a Student Becomes a Dropout

## *The Dropout Problem in Numbers**

### *Millions of students leave school before high school graduation.*

- In School Year 2002-2003, US public schools awarded 2.7 million diplomas and the National Center for Education Statistics calculated the graduation rate to be 73.9%. Graduation rates varied greatly by state, from 87% in New Jersey to under 60% in the District of Columbia and South Carolina. Thirty-nine states increased their graduation rates from 2001 to 2003 while most southern states, plus Alaska, the District of Columbia, and New York, experienced declines.[1] Other authoritative research found the 2002 graduation rate to be 71%, little changed from 1991's 72%.[2]

- In 2004, there were 27,819,000 18-24-year-olds in the United States. Of these, 21,542,000 (78%) had either graduated from high school, earned a GED, completed some college, or earned an associate's or bachelor's degree. The balance, 6,277,000 (22%), had not yet completed high school.[3] Some scholars exclude GED holders, resulting in a much higher noncompletion figure. Similarly, if researchers count the adult population over age 24, the high school noncompletion rate would be higher still.[4]

- An estimated 3.8 million youth ages 18-24 are neither employed nor in school—15% of all young adults. From 2000 to 2004, the ranks of these disconnected young adults grew by 700,000.[5]

- From 1990 to 2000, high school completion rates declined in all but seven states and the rate of students dropping out between 9th and 10th grades increased.[6]

### *Members of some demographic groups are at much greater risk of dropping out of school.*

- Nationally, only about two-thirds of all students who enter 9th grade graduate with regular high school diplomas four years later. For minority males, these figures are far lower.[7] In 2001, on average, 72% of female students, but only 64% of male students graduated. African American students had a graduation rate of 50%, the lowest of racial and ethnic groups identified; the other student groups graduated at the following rates: American Indian, 51%; Latino, 53%; White, 75%; and Asian and Pacific Islander, 77%. But there were enormous disparities among state graduation levels, and even larger disparities by ethnicity and gender within the same states.[8]

- In SY 2000-2001, high school students from low-income families (the lowest 20%) dropped out of school at six times the rate of their peers from higher-income families.[9]

- In SY 2000-2001, only 47.6% of persons with disabilities ages 14 and older graduated with standard diplomas while 41.1% dropped out.[10]

### *When young people drop out of school, they—and American society at large—face multiple negative consequences.*

- Of those who fail to graduate with their peers, one-quarter eventually earn a diploma, one-quarter earn the GED, and about one-half do not earn a high school credential.[11]

* There is no generally-accepted definition of a dropout. Some use school enrollment figures; others rely on US Census population surveys. Some include GED recipients; others do not. Some keep records of transfer students; many do not.

- Three-quarters of state prison inmates are dropouts, as are 59% of federal inmates.[12] In fact, dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated in their lifetime.[13] African American men are disproportionately incarcerated. Of all African American male dropouts in their early 30s, 52% have been imprisoned.[14] 90% of the 11,000 youth in adult detention facilities have no more than a 9th grade education.[15]

- The earning power of dropouts has been in almost continuous decline over the past three decades. In 1971, male dropouts earned $35,087 (in 2002 dollars), but this fell 35% to $23,903 in 2002. Earnings for female dropouts fell from $19,888 to $17,114.[16] The mean earnings of Latino young adults who finish high school are 43% higher than those who dropout.[17]

- The earnings gap widens with years of schooling and formal training. In 2003, annual earnings of male dropouts fell to $21,447. High school graduates earned an average of $32,266; those with associate's degrees earned $43,462; bachelor's degree holders earned $63,084—about triple that of dropouts.[18]

- In 2001, only 55% of young adult dropouts were employed, compared with 74% of high school graduates and 87% of four-year college graduates.[19]

- Between 1997 and 2001, more than one-quarter of all dropouts were unemployed for one year or longer, compared with 11% of those with a high school diploma or GED.[20] In 2003, more than one-half of African American young adult male dropouts in Chicago were unemployed.[21]

- The US death rate for persons with fewer than 12 years of education is 2.5 times higher than for those with 13 or more years of education.[22]

- Dropouts are substantially more likely to rely on public assistance than those with a high school diploma.[23] The estimated lifetime revenue loss for male dropouts ages 25-34 is $944 billion. The cost to the public of their crime and welfare benefits is estimated to total $24 billion annually.[24]

- Dropouts contribute to state and federal tax coffers at only about one-half the rate of high school graduates; over a working lifetime about $60,000 less, or $50 billion annually for the 23 million high school non-completers, ages 18-67.[25]

- The US would save $41.8 billion in health care costs if the 600,000 young people who dropped out in 2004 were to complete one additional year of education. If only one-third of high school dropouts were to earn a high school diploma, federal savings in reduced costs for food stamps, housing assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families would amount to $10.8 billion annually.[26]

- Increasing the high school completion rate by 1% for all men ages 20-60 would save the United States $1.4 billion annually in reduced costs associated with crime.[27]

- Federal investments in second-chance education and training programs fell from $15 billion in the late 1970s to $3 billion (inflation-adjusted) today.[28]

- Dropouts "cost our nation more than $260 billion dollars...That's in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity over their lifetimes. In federal dollars, that will buy you ten years of research at the National Institutes of Health."[29]

- The statistic bears repeating: every nine seconds in America a student becomes a dropout.[30]

## Sources


1 Seastrom, M., et al. (2005). *The averaged freshman graduation rate for public high schools from the Common Core of Data: School years 2001-03.* Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

2 Greene, J.P., & Winters M.A. (2005, February), p. 1.

3 National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *Digest of education statistics 2004.* Washington, DC, Table 9; Greene, J.P., & Winters, M.A. (2005, February). "Public high school graduation and college readiness rates: 1991-2002." *Education Working Paper No. 8.* New York, NY: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

4 Hood, L. (2004). *High school students at risk: The challenge of dropouts and pushouts.* New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The condition of education 2005.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, pp. 55-57; Reimer, M., & Smink, J. (2005). *Information about the school dropout issue.* Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University.

5 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2004). *Kids count data book.* Baltimore, MD: Author.

6 Barton, P. E. (2005). *One-third of a nation: Rising dropout rates and declining opportunities.* Princeton, NJ: Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, p. 3.

7 Orfield, G. (Ed.). (2004). *Dropouts in America: confronting the graduation rate crisis.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, p. 1. See also: Swanson, C.B. (2004). *Who graduates? Who doesn't? A statistical portrait of public high-school graduation.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

8 Orfield, G., Losen, D.J., Wald, J., & Swanson, C. B. (2004). *Losing our future: How minority youth are being left behind by the graduation rate crisis.* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. See also: Losen, D.J. (2005, December). *Racial inequity in graduation rates.* Research presented during Connect for Kids and National Education Association conference call on the Dropout Crisis. Greene, J.P., & Winters, M.A. (2005, February) find the African American graduation rate in 2002 to be 56%, Latinos 52%, and Whites 78%.

9 US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *The condition of education 2004.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, Indicator 10, p. 11.

10 US Department of Education. (2003). *Twenty-fifth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC.

11 Alliance for Excellent Education. (2004). *A framework for an excellent education for all high school students.* Washington, DC: Author.

12 Harlow, C.W. (2003). *Education and correctional populations, bureau of justice statistics special report.* Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

13 Catterall, J.S. (1985). *On the social cost of dropping out.* Stanford, CA: Center for Education Research, cited in Alliance for Excellent Education. (2004, December). *Measuring graduation to measure success.* Washington, DC: Author.

14 Western, B., Schiraldi, V., & Zienberg, J. (2004). *Education and incarceration.* Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, p. 1.

15 Coalition for Juvenile Justice. (2001). *From the prison track to the college track.* Washington, DC: Author.

16 Barton, P.E. (2005), p. 5.

17 US Bureau of the Census. (2002). *Educational attainment in the United States.* Washington, DC, Table 9.

18 Center on Education Policy and American Youth Policy Forum. (2001). *Higher learning = higher earnings.* Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy and American Youth Policy Forum.

19 Sum, Andrew et al. (2002). *Left behind in the labor market: labor market problems of the nation's out-of-school, young adult populations.* Chicago, IL: Alternative Schools Network. Retrieved December 27, 2005 from http://www.nupe.neu.edu/2-03/left_behind.pdf

20 Wald, M., & Martinez, T. (2003). Connected by 25: Improving life chances of the country's most vulnerable 14-24-year-olds. *William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Working Paper.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University. Retrieved December 27, 2005 from www.youthtransitions.org

21 Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University. (2003). *Youth labor market and education indicators for the state of Illinois.* Chicago, IL: Alternative Schools Network.

22 Alliance for Excellent Education. (2003). *Fact sheet: The impact of education on health and well-being.* Washington, DC: Author.

23 Adair, V.C. (2001). Poverty and the (broken) promise of education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(2), pp. 217-239.

24 Thorstensen, B. I. *If you build it, they will come: Investing in public education.* Retrieved December 27, 2005 from http://abec.unm.edu/resources/gallery/present/invest_in_ed.pdf

25 Rouse, C.E. (2005, October). *The labor market consequences of an inadequate education.* Paper presented at the symposium on the social costs of inadequate education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY. Retrieved December 27, 2005 from http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/speakers.asp?SpeakerId=11

26 Muennig, P. (2005, October). *Health returns to education interventions.* Paper presented at the symposium on the social costs of inadequate education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY. Retrieved December 27, 2005 from http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/resourceDetails.asp?PresId=5

27 Moretti, E. (2005, October). *Does education reduce participation in criminal activities?* Paper presented at the symposium on the social costs of inadequate education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY. Retrieved December 27, 2005 from http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/speakers.asp?SpeakerId=9

28 Barton, P.E. (2005), p. 4.

29 *Closing the achievement gap in American schools: The No Child Left Behind Act: Hearing before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives*, 109th Cong. (2005, September 29) (testimony of Margaret Spellings). Retrieved December 27, 2005 from (http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/109th/fc/spellingsnclb092905/spellings.htm

30 Lehr, C.A. et al. (2004). *Essential tools: Increasing rates of school completion.* Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. (Full text available online from Education Commission of the States at: http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=6649)

National Working Group on
Foster Care and Education

# Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care
## Fact Sheet
## December 2006

For the over 800,000 children and youth served in foster care each year in the United States, educational success is a potential positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence. Positive school experiences enhance their well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as their ability to contribute to society.

Unfortunately, the educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care are dismal. As this current research summary reveals, young people in foster care are in educational crises. Although data are limited, particularly national data, research makes it clear that there are serious issues that must be addressed to ensure the educational success of children and youth in foster care.

## SCHOOL PLACEMENT STABILITY/ENROLLMENT ISSUES

**School Mobility Rates of Children and Youth in Foster Care**

- Children and youth have an average of one to two home placement changes per year while in out-of-home care.[1]
- A 2001 study of more than 4,500 children and youth in foster care in Washington State found that at both the elementary and secondary levels, twice as many youth in foster care as youth not in care had changed schools during the year.[2]
- In a New York study of 70 children and youth in foster care, more than 75% did not remain in their school once placed in foster care, and almost 65% had been transferred in the middle of the school year.[3]
- A three-state study of youth aging out of care (the Midwest Study) by Chapin Hall revealed substantial levels of school mobility associated with placement in out-of-home care. Over a third of young adults reported having had five or more school changes.[4]
- School mobility rates are highest for those entering care for the first time. According to another Chapin Hall study of almost 16,000 children and youth in the Chicago Public School system, over two-thirds switched schools shortly after their initial placement in out-of-home care.[5]

**Negative Effects of School Mobility**

- A 1996 study students in Chicago Public Schools found that students who had changed schools four or more times had lost approximately one year of educational growth by their sixth year.
- A 1999 study found that California high school students who changed schools even once were less than half as likely to graduate as those who did not change schools, even when controlling for other variables that affect high school completion.[7]
- In a national study of 1,087 foster care alumni, youth who had had one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving care.[8]

**Suspensions/Expulsions**

- 66.8% of youth in out-of-home care in the Midwest Study had been suspended at least once from school (compared to a national sample of 27.8%). About one
  4.6% of the national sample.[9]

**Enrollment Issues**

- In the New York study, 42% of the children and youth did not begin school immediately upon entering foster care. Nearly half of these young people said that they were kept out of school because of lost or misplaced school records.[10]
- A 2001 Bay Area study of over 300 foster parents found that "missing information from prior schools increased the odds of enrollment delays by 6.5 times".[11]

This product was produced and developed by Casey Family Programs, 1300 Dexter Ave N #300 Seattle, WA 98109 www.casey.org

## ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

**Academic Achievement**

- The 2001 Washington State study found that children and youth in foster care attending public schools scored 16 to 20 percentile points below non-foster youth in statewide standardized tests at grades three, six and nine.[12]
- Youth in foster care in the Midwest Study, interviewed primarily after completing 10th or 11th grade, on average read at only a seventh grade level. Approximately 44% read at high school level or higher. Few excelled in academic subjects, especially relative to a comparable national sample. Less than one in five received an "A" in English, math, history, or science.[13]
- Chapin Hall's research on Chicago Public School children and youth in out-of-home care indicates they lag at least half a school year behind demographically similar students in the same schools. (There is an overall achievement gap of upwards of one year. However, some of this is attributed to the low-performing schools that many of them attend). Almost 50% of third to eighth grade students in out-of-home care scored in the bottom quartile on the reading section of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) test.[14]

**Grade Retention/Old for Grade**

- In the Washington State study, twice as many youth in foster care at both the elementary and secondary levels repeated a grade compared to youth not in care.[15]
- Nearly 45% of youth in care in the New York State study reported being retained at least once in school.[16]
- In the Midwest Study, 37.2% of youth in foster care (compared with 21.5% of a comparable national sample) reported repeating a grade.[17]
- Chicago Public School students in out-of-home care were almost twice as likely as other students to be old for their grade, by at least a year, even after demographic factors were taken into account and comparisons made to other students attending the same schools.[18]

## SPECIAL EDUCATION ISSUES

**Number of Youth in Special Education**

- Numerous studies indicate anywhere between one-quarter and almost one-half (23%-47%) of children and youth in out-of-home care in the U.S. receive special education services at some point in their schooling.[19]
- At both the elementary and secondary levels, more than twice as many foster youth as non-foster youth in the Washington State study had enrolled in special education programs.[20]
- Nearly half of the youth in foster care in the Midwest Study had been placed in special education at least once during the course of their education.[21]
- Chicago Public School students in out-of-home care between sixth and eighth grades were classified as eligible for special education nearly three times more frequently than other students.[22]

**Advocacy Regarding Special Education Services**

- In research done in 2000 by Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.:
  - 90% of biological parents of children in foster care surveyed did not participate in any special education processes concerning their child.[23]
  - 60% of caseworkers/social workers surveyed "were not aware of existing laws when referring children to special education" and over 50% said "that their clients did not receive appropriate services very often while in foster care".[24]
- A 1990 study in Oregon found that children who had multiple foster care placements and who needed special education were less likely to receive those services than children in more stable placements.

## SOCIAL-BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

**Mental Health**

- In a recent study of foster care alumni in Oregon and Washington (Northwest Alumni Study), 54.4% of alumni had one or more mental health disorders in the past 12 months, such as depression, social phobia or panic syndrome (compared with 22.1% of general population).[25]
- In the same study, 25.2% had post-traumatic stress disorder within the past 12 months (compared with 4.0% of general population), which is twice the rate of U.S. war veterans.[26]

**Social-Behavioral**

- Several studies have found that children and youth in foster care are significantly more likely to have school behavior problems and that they have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions from school.[27]
- Recent research in Chicago confirmed previous statewide research findings that children in foster care are significantly more likely than children in the general population to have a special education classification of an emotional or behavioral disturbance.[28]
- In the Midwest Study, by about 19 years of age, almost half of the young women had been pregnant, a significantly higher percentage than the 20% in a comparative national sample.[29]

## HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

**High School Completion Rates/Drop-Out Rates**

- A recent report by the EPE Research Center indicates that the nationwide high school completion rate for **all** students is 70%. More are lost in ninth grade than in any other grade (9th: 35%; 10th: 28%; 11th: 20%; 12th: 17%).[30]
- Studies have found differing rates of high school completion (through a degree or GED) though the measures have been defined somewhat differently:
  - In the Washington State study, 59% of youth in foster care enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of 12th grade.[31]
  - The young adults in the Northwest Alumni Study completed high school **(via diploma or GED)** at 84.8% which is close to the general population rate of 87.3%.[32]
  - Over one-third of the young people the Midwest Study had received neither a high school diploma nor a GED by age 19, compared to fewer than 10% of their same-age peers in a comparable national sample.[33]
  - A national study in 1994 of young adults who had been discharged from foster care found that 54% had completed high school.[34]
  - In the Chapin Hall study of Chicago Public School youth, fifteen-year-old students in out-of-home care were about half as likely as other students to have graduated 5 years later, with significantly higher percentages of students in care having dropped out (55%) or incarcerated (10%).[35]

**Factors Contributing to Dropping Out**

- Multiple studies suggest that being retained in a grade significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out.[36] For example, one study found that being retained even once between first and eighth grade makes a student four times more likely to drop out than a classmate who was never held back, even after controlling for multiple factors.[37]
- The recent report by the EPE Research Center indicates that repeating a grade, changing schools, and behavior problems are among the host of signals that a student is likely to leave school without a traditional diploma.[38]
- The book, Drop Outs in America reports research that shows the following students are at-risk for dropping out: students of color, students who had been held back, students who are older than others in their grade, and English-language learners.[39]

## POST-SECONDARY ENTRANCE/COMPLETION RATES

**Post-secondary Entrance/Completion Rates**

- The Northwest Alumni Study found that of the foster care alumni who were interviewed,
  - 42.7% completed some education beyond high school
  - 20.6% completed any degree/certificate beyond high school
  - 16.1% completed a vocational degree (21.9% among those age 25 or older)
  - 1.8% completed a bachelor's degree: (2.7% among those age 25 or older) (24% is the completion rate among the general population of same age)[40]
- Recent longitudinal data (from the general population) suggests that 39% of students who enrolled in a public two-year institution received a credential within six years (28%--associate degree or certificate, 11%--baccalaureate).[41]

**College Preparation/Aspiration**

- The majority of those youth in out-of-home care interviewed in the Midwest Study at age 17-18 hoped and expected to graduate from college eventually.[42]

- Another study indicates that only 15% of youth in foster care are likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes versus 32% of students not in foster care.[43]
- Strong academic preparation has been found to be the single most important factor in enrolling and succeeding in a postsecondary program. However, in the United States, studies of the general population have found that:
  - Only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college.[44]
  - Only 20% of all African American and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college-ready.[45]
  - Between 30-60% of students "now require remedial education upon entry to college, depending on the type of institution they attend".[46]

---

**Endnotes**

Visit www.casey.org/friendsandfamilies/partners for fact sheet citations.

[1] National AFCARS data, 2002
[2] Burley & Halpern, 2001, p. 1
[3] Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., 2000, p. 5
[4] Courtney, et al., 2004, p. 42
[5] Smithgall et al., 2004, p.46
[6] Kerbow, University of Chicago, 1996, p.20
[7] Rumberger, et al., 1999, p. 37
[8] Pecora et al., 2003, p. 44
[9] Courtney, et al., 2004, pg. 42
[10] Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., 2000, p. 4
[11] Choice, et al., 2001, p. 44
[12] Burley & Halpern, 2001, p. 13
[13] Courtney, et al., 2004, pp. 43, 45
[14] Smithgall et. al. 2004, pp. 14, 17
[15] Burley & Halpern, 2001, p. 1
[16] Advocates for Children of New York, inc., 2000, p. 45
[17] Courtney, et al., 2004, p. 42
[18] Smithgall et. al. 2004, p. 22
[19] Courtney, et al., 2004 (47% of 732); Smithgall, et al., 2004 (45% of 1,216 sixth through eighth graders); Burley and Halpern, 2001 (23% of 1,423 third graders, 29% of 1,539 six graders, 24% of 1,597 ninth graders); Choice, et al., 2001 (36% of 303); Advocates for Children of New York Inc., 2000 (30% of 70); Zanghi, 1999 (41% of 134); Jones, et. al., 1998 (23% of 249); Goerge, et al., 1992 (29.1% of 14,714)
[20] Burley & Halpern, 2001, p. 16
[21] Courtney, et al., 2004, p. 40
[22] Smithgall et. al. 2004, p. 58
[23] Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., 2000, p. 6
[24] Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., 2000, p. 6.
[25] Pecora et al., 2005, p. 34
[26] Ibid.
[27] Courtney, et al., 2004, pg. 42; Barber & Delfabbro, 2003, pp. 6, 7; McMillen et al., 2003, p. 475; Zima et al., 2000, pp. 98, 99
[28] Goerge et al., 1992, p. 3; Smithgall et al., 2004, p. 58
[29] Courtney, et al., 2005, p. 54
[30] EPE Research Center, 2006
[31] Burley & Halpern, 2001, p. 1
[32] Pecora, et al., 2005, p. 35
[33] Courtney, et al., 2005, p. 22
[34] Cook, 1994, p. 218
[35] Smithgall et. al. 2004, p. 28
[36] Studies quoted in Rumberger, 2000, p. 14
[37] Rumberger, 1995, p. 601
[38] EPE Research Center, 2006
[39] Orfield, G., Ed., 2004, p. 157
[40] Pecora, et al., 2005, p. 36
[41] ACE Center for Policy Analysis, 2003, p.3
[42] Courtney, et al., 2004, p. 39
[43] Blome, 1997 cited in Sheehy et al., 2001, p. 9
[44] Greene, 2005, p. 9
[45] Ibid.
[46] Conley, 2005, p. xi

## Promoting Educational Success for Young People in Foster Care
### *National Foster Youth Advisory Council*

We, the members of the National Foster Youth Advisory Council (NFYAC), believe that every child and young person in foster care is entitled to the wide range of supports, services, and opportunities that promote our educational success.

We believe that all children and youth in foster care need:

- Caring and involved adults who *know* us, understand our experiences in foster care, and can assist us with educational planning and achievement;
- Safety, stability, and permanency, and the ability to attend our "home school" without disruption;
- Confidentiality of records and respect for our right to privacy;
- Support in accessing opportunities that promote our well-being and the ability to reach our full potential;
- The ability to pursue an educational or training program of our own choosing;
- Immediate enrollment in a new school, timely transfer of school credits, and continuity with regard to educational records when moves to other schools occur;
- Access to information, resources, and strategies that promote positive educational experiences;

*"What Worked" - Key Components of Our Success*

Members of the National Foster Youth Advisory Council convened on two occasions during 2003, to address the many challenges facing young people in foster care with regard to education. To move beyond a focus on the problems that youth encounter, group members were asked to identify *What Worked* and the range of supports that facilitated their educational success. The group articulated the following key components:

1. NFYAC members identified caring people, those individuals who comprise our "circle of support," as the most critical support. For some, foster parents, siblings, mentors, "homework buddies" (peers who support completion of assignments), coaches, guidance counselors, and teachers were the individuals who made a difference. Others identified educational advocates and tutors – those individuals charged with supporting the educational achievement of the youth with whom they work.

2. Overwhelmingly, NFYAC members stressed the importance of having permanency and a sense of safety and stability. One Council member expressed, "young people need permanent homes and need to know that they're not going to be randomly moved from place to place." Having a safe place to live and call "home" makes it easier to build relationships with caring adults, and to ultimately develop a circle of support that facilitates success across the board, especially around education. Members felt strongly



*The National Foster Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare League of America.*

about the custodial agency's responsibility to maintain the youth's school placement, even if the young person is attending private school.

On the issue of safety, a number of young people raised the issue of bullying in schools. For many who struggled with "always being the new kid in school," not having a group of close friends, and not having the resources to wear the "latest fashions," school often represented a place where they were misunderstood, ridiculed, and singled out as different. Efforts to address bullying in school settings and its root causes are critical to ensuring safety and an affirming learning environment for all young people, but especially for those in foster care.

3. Financial assistance was also an important component of the 'recipe' for educational success. Many NFYAC members identified resources that support the pursuit of post-secondary education, such as tuition waivers, support for room and board, cash assistance and scholarships. A number of members also highlighted the importance of having assistance with college visits and tours and the completion of applications, especially for federal financial aid. There was also quite a bit of discussion around health care and obtaining insurance if you leave the state where you were in care to attend college. Lastly, other supports, such as free breakfast and lunch programs, having a dress code and school uniforms (to defray the costs of clothing for school), providing school supplies, and transportation assistance were helpful to young people struggling to be successful in elementary through high school.

4. Flexibility with educational planning, such as the ability to choose classes and deal with multiple absences, credit recovery programs, and summer school were helpful to young people trying to stay on track with their education. Because the timely recovery of credits and transfer of school records pose major challenges to young people attempting to enroll in new schools, the aforementioned supports were essential to promoting academic continuity and success. NFYAC members also expressed that having teachers who understood their experiences in foster care made a big difference.

5. Programs promoting child and youth development were particularly supportive of young people in foster care. Many NFYAC members remembered being involved with Head Start programs and reflected on the important role that extracurricular and after school programs had on their educational success.

*Recommendations for Improving Educational Outcomes*

Given the list of challenges and corresponding supports that the group identified, NFYAC members were asked to generate a list of recommendations for improving educational outcomes for young people in foster care. As the discussions took place, it was evident that these recommendations were not solely limited to improving educational outcomes, but spoke to a much broader need to revisit the way in which success is defined and pursued for America's foster youth.



*The National Foster Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare League of America.*

The issue of educational underachievement is related to many of the other negative outcomes experienced by young people leaving foster care. With limited supports and resources, young people are forced to focus on day-to-day survival. As one member said, "If all aspects of your life are unbalanced and you need to figure out where you're going to spend the night, it's going to be difficult to think about your education."

Members of NFYAC believe in the strengths, talents, and potential of all young people in foster care. Our central message is that young people in foster care require what all young people need to become contributing members of society - unconditional love, care, and support and a strong connection to caring adults and communities that are willing to invest in our well-being and success.

*NYFAC's Top Ten Recommendations for Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care:*

*Help me create my circle of support.*

Everyone needs to feel loved and cared for! Young people in foster care need to experience a sense of belonging - they need to have someone to rely on when things get tough and also need to have someone to call upon when it's time to celebrate. Parents, caregivers, peers, teachers and other supportive adults need to be engaged in supporting young people in a variety of ways, especially when it comes to educational decisions and planning. To improve educational outcomes, we need to revisit the broad range of youth outcomes that we articulate for young people involved with the child welfare system. Having access and connections to "people resources" as well as opportunities to create one's own "circle of support" are critical components of facilitating the positive development of youth in care.

*Make sure I have a place to call home.*

A "home" is much more than just having a place to live – it's knowing that you're safe, feeling "wanted," and having a permanent place to *be*. Having a home means having a place to go for the holidays and summer vacations. It means you don't have to take all of your belongings with you when you leave. The research shows that placement instability negatively impacts the educational achievement of young people in foster care. When youth are moved from place to place – it's challenging to focus on anything beyond immediate day-to-day survival. All young people, regardless of what their experiences are or where they come from, need a place to call home.

*Let me be involved in making decisions about my life.*

Young people learn to make good decisions by having opportunities to make choices and be held accountable. Sometimes that involves making mistakes. Because of the way in which the child welfare system works, adults often presume that they know what's best without really understanding the experiences, hopes, and dreams of the young people with whom they work. Young people should be involved in making decisions about their educational future – we have a right to have our voices heard.



*The National Foster Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare League of America.*

*Get to know me for who I am, NOT what I'm in.*

The stigma of foster care has negatively impacted the lives of many young people who have spent time in out-of-home care. Many young people who are involved with the foster care system grow up believing that they are incapable of achieving success. One NFYAC member remembers a school policy that prevented her from being allowed to bring school textbooks home *simply because she was in foster care.* The messages inherent in these types of policies and practices send damaging and discouraging messages to young people about their value and their potential for success. Negative assumptions about and low expectations for foster youth are so pervasive in our society. We need to "raise the bar" for young people in foster care, refrain from labeling them, and make sure that we're communicating belief and confidence in their ability to accomplish great things and fulfill their dreams. As one NFYAC member exclaimed, "Talk to me about getting a PhD., not just a GED!"

*Focus on what's "right" about me, not just what's wrong.*

Many young people in foster care have experienced abuse and neglect, and as a result, may be dealing with a range of issues. While young people need to be supported in accessing treatment and/or counseling when necessary, the child welfare system tends to focus on the problems and challenges and does little to highlight the strengths of individuals and families. Members of NFYAC call for a shift in deficits or failure focused thinking when dealing with young people. Young people need support in identifying their strengths, thinking about their potential, and highlighting their interests and aspirations. When caring adults focus on what's right with young people, the possibilities are endless.

*Help adults in my life, especially my teachers and guidance counselors, understand the system with which I'm involved.*

The general public does not have an understanding of foster care and the young people that are involved with the system. We need to build awareness and educate the public about the unique strengths of and challenges facing youth in care. It is especially important to provide information, resources, and training to educators – and to involve young people and foster parents in the design and delivery of such staff development opportunities. Young people in foster care possess a wealth of information about the system. Their knowledge, insights, and expertise represent an untapped resource that is invaluable to the adults who work with them.

*Connect me with information.*

Young people need to have access to information and support in navigating many of the resources that exist. Whether it's information about scholarship opportunities, health insurance, college tours, or community programs that support educational success, young people also need to develop their own strategies for managing multiple sources of information. Members of NFYAC articulated the importance of ensuring that young people have opportunities to manage information about themselves and specifically highlighted "educational passports" as an effective tool. Lastly, young people need to be connected with information about state and federal



*The National Foster Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare League of America.*

policies that have the potential to impact their foster care and educational experiences – the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the Education and Training Vouchers programs are examples of key federal policies.

*Respect our privacy.*

"Would _____ please come to the office? Your social worker is here." Many of the members of NFYAC remember hearing their names called over the intercom system at school and these announcements often included pieces of personal information that didn't need to be shared with the entire school. Others recall that sensitive information about their circumstances was unnecessarily accessible to students and administrative personnel working in school offices.

The issue of confidentiality is a sensitive one for many young people in foster care, particularly in school settings. While members of NFYAC understand that there are times when information about the lives and families of young people in care needs to be shared, there is also a sense that the information sharing is not always conducted in a manner that prioritizes the privacy of the young people involved. NFYAC members highlighted the fact that many young people in foster care do not want information about their family history or living situation shared with their peers or other adults not involved with their educational planning. In school settings, administrators, teachers, social workers, and counselors can support young people by using discretion with sensitive and personal information, maintaining confidentiality of records, and respecting their right to privacy.

*Teach me to take care of myself.*

"Life skills development begins with learning to tie your own shoes – it's not something that starts when you turn 16!" Developing the skills needed to take care of oneself occurs over time. This process begins in childhood and continues throughout the lifespan. Young people in foster care need both formal and informal learning opportunities to acquire, practice, and utilize basic living skills. These skills include "tangible" or competency-based skills like completion of high school and the pursuit of post-secondary education as well as "intangible" skills such as a sense of self confidence and purpose and the ability to make good decisions.

*Develop federal and state policies that promote our success.*

While there has been much legislative activity benefiting young people in foster care during the last five years, much remains to be done. Members of NFYAC are committed to supporting and partnering with decision makers at the local, state, and federal levels to craft legislation that prioritizes the health and well-being of foster youth in our country.



*The National Foster Youth Advisory Council is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare League of America.*

Mr. WELLER. Thank you.

Chairman MCDERMOTT. I want to thank you all for coming and spending the time as you have sat here for a couple of hours. As Mr. Meek said, the most important thing we miss is personal testimonials. We hear experts come in and talk to us but it is really good to have a couple of people come and tell us what really happens to them. That puts a public face on it that makes it very powerful, so thank you very much for both of you coming and exposing yourself, talking about tough things in life. We appreciate it.

Thank you all. The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:00 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Submissions for the Record follow:]

**Statement of Center for Law and Social Policy**

Thank you for focusing attention on this most important challenge related to our youth and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the subcommittee. I am the Director for Youth Policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). CLASP is a nonprofit organization engaged in research, analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on a range of issues affecting low-income families. Our youth policy work at CLASP has focused attention on the dimensions of the disconnected youth challenge in our nation and on the need to look more strategically at how our youth serving systems—education, workforce, juvenile justice, child welfare—can come together and in tandem with the business community and community based organizations create the infrastructure and support to connect our youth to positive pathways to adult success.

The desperate situation in many of our poor urban, rural, and minority communities where fewer than half of the youth that start high school complete four years later necessitates bold, strategic thinking and comprehensive interventions.

I am submitting for the record an article "What's a Youngster to Do? The Education and Labor Market Plight of Youth in High Poverty Communities" that I authored and that was published in the July 2005 issue of the Clearinghouse REVIEW Journal of Poverty Law and Policy. The challenges and solutions outlined in this article are very relevant to the subject matter of this hearing and the work of the subcommittee. This article draws attention to the dimensions of the youth challenge in several high poverty communities. It also points out that we know a great deal about what works to transform the pathways for these youth. It suggests the need for a new paradigm. One that recognizes that if this issue is to be solved it will require all systems and sectors to participate at the ground level building the system connections, supports, programs and pathways that will be needed to upgrade the skills of these youth and to secure their economic future. It will require the collective will, the resources, and an investment in building the capacity and the programming in these communities to address this problem at the scale necessary to produce measurable and sustainable improvements in the education and labor market outcomes for these young people who, absent intervention, will have extreme difficulty with adult labor market, family, and civic responsibilities.

---

**What's a Youngster To Do? The Education and Labor Market Plight of Youth in High Poverty Communities**

***Linda Harris, Director, Youth Policy***
***Center for Law and Social Policy***

**Published in The Clearinghouse REVIEW Journal of Poverty Law and Policy**
**July/August 2005**

*"Our economy, national security, and social cohesion face a precarious future if our nation fails to develop now the comprehensive policies and programs needed to help all youth. In developing these polices and programs, it is crucial to recognize the growing gap between more fortunate youth and those with far fewer advantages. . . . Unless we are motivated, at least in part, by our belief in young people and our sense of obligation to them, we risk losing more than we can ever hope to win."* **William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, The *Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America,* 1988**

For almost two decades researchers and economists warned about an impending crisis for the young and the unskilled in the labor market. Those tracking the demographic trends, the labor market shifts, the immigration patterns, and the global influences predicted that, absent substantial intervention, youth, especially youth in the urban core, would face perilous times coming into the 21st century. Economist in the 1987 publication *Workforce 2000* noted that most new jobs created in the nineties and beyond would require some level of post-secondary education. They cautioned that without substantial adjustment in policies and without investments being made in education and training, the problems of minority unemployment, crime and dependency would be worse in the year 2000.[1] The National Center on Education and the Economy in their 1990 report *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages* noted that 1 in 5 young people in this country grow up in third world surroundings and start out with severe learning disadvantages from which they never recover. They recommended the investment in a dropout recovery system that would build the connection between education and work for youth without high school certification.[2] Despite these admonitions, federal investment in employment, training and second chance programs decreased dramatically over the ensuing 15 years.

The future that these studies predicted is upon us, with the attending consequences. While the national graduation rate for youth in public school is an appalling 68%, the rate for youth in high poverty urban districts is below 50%. The lack of attention and public will around this issue is attributable in part to the fact that the aggregate statistics on graduation rates and employment rates for the nation's youth masks the stark reality of the problem for youth in poor urban, rural, or minority communities. This situation goes largely unattended because this is an invisible constituency. When young people drop out, or disconnect, or stop looking for work they are no longer counted in any system or any statistic unless they find their way to the public welfare system or the criminal justice system as many of them do. No public institution or system is called upon to account for the preparation and transition of youth to the labor market.

Prevailing sentiment would rest that responsibility with the parent and student and that would be quite appropriate if we were talking about a small minority of students falling by the wayside. However, when more than half of the young people attending public school in a community leave school before graduating, the problem is beyond that of parental and personal responsibility. It is evidence of the breakdown of the education, community, and economic infrastructure that in healthy communities prepares and supports youth as they transition to adulthood. In economically distressed communities these institutions are overburdened, under-resourced, broken, or simply incapable of providing the level of support needed to prepare these youth for successful transition to adulthood and the labor market.

This article focuses a lens on the situation for youth in selected large cities with poverty rates above 30% and with school districts that have more than 60% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunches. Twelve cities were selected to amplify the challenges faced by young people growing up in these urban areas: Atlanta, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Fresno, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. Totally, just over 3 million students were enrolled in these districts, 86.1% of them minority. Table 1 displays the general profile of distress in these communities.

Consider the prospects for these youth. One in three resides in a household that is below the poverty level, twice the national average. They live in communities where the rate of violent crime is 3 times the national average. Youth are twice as likely to be arrested and almost twice as likely to be a teen parent. Only one in two youth entering high school will graduate and only 14% of minority youth will complete 4 years of college (compared to 49.7% of White youth). This environment of low achievement, low expectations, early exposure to violent and illicit activity, and lack of exposure to positive pathways out, constrains the life options for young people. It is a daunting landscape for an adolescent to navigate. There are youth who will graduate and go on to post-secondary success. They will do so against considerable odds.

Equally bleak are the labor market prospects for youth who don't complete high school in these communities. The chart below presents a few labor market statistics from the 2000 Decennial Census. While this profile is as of the last census, recent analysis by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University shows

[1] Johnson, W., Packer, A., Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century, Hudson Institute, U.S. Department of Labor, 1987.

[2] National Center on Education and the Economy, America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!, 1990, pg. 44.

a worsening situation for teens in the labor market with teen employment being at its lowest level in 57 years.[3]

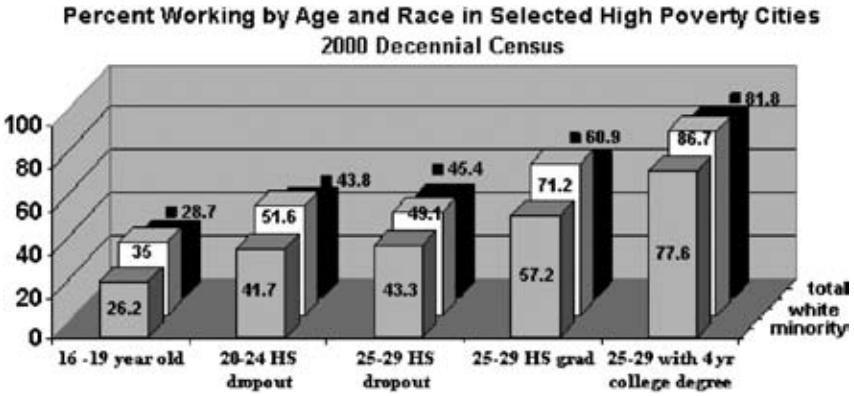
[3] Sum, A., Khatiwada, I., McLaughlin, J., Palma, S. The Paradox of Rising Teen Joblessness in an Expanding Labor Market: The Absence of Teen Employment Growth in the National Jobs Recovery of 2003–2004, Center For Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, January 2005.

**Table 1: Profile of High Poverty Cities**

| City | School Enrollment[1] | % Minority[1] | % below poverty line[2] | | | Violent crime rate[3] | Juvenile arrest rate (100,000)[4] | Teen births[5] | Graduation rate[1] | % teens[6] employed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Total | Black | Hispanic | | | | | |
| Atlanta | 58,320 | 93.2 | 39.3 | 47.0 | 29.0 | 2,289 | 607 | 100 | 39.6 | 30.9 |
| Baltimore | 99,859 | 89.2 | 31.0 | 35.8 | 22.9 | 2,054 | 1,281 | 86 | 47.9 | 28.4 |
| Buffalo | 45,721 | 71.5 | 38.7 | 45.0 | 56.7 | 1,271 | 327 | 72 | 47.3 | 34.2 |
| Cleveland | 75,684 | 80.7 | 38.0 | 45.6 | 40.6 | 1,322 | NA | 99 | 30.0 | 32.4 |
| Detroit | 162,194 | 96.3 | 34.8 | 35.2 | 31.9 | 2,072 | 200 | 78 | 57.0 | 28.8 |
| Fresno | 79,007 | 79.8 | 36.8 | 44.6 | 40.5 | 853 | 423 | 86 | 55.8 | 28.3 |
| Los Angeles | 721,346 | 90.1 | 30.7 | 38.5 | 36.6 | 1,349 | 304 | 61 | 46.4 | 27.2 |
| Miami[7] | 368,265 | 88.7 | 38.5 | 52.4 | 34.6 | 1,906 | NA | 174 | 52.1 | 26.0 |
| Milwaukee | 97,985 | 81.3 | 32.0 | 43.7 | 33.2 | 956 | 892 | 88 | 45.8 | 39.2 |
| New York | 1,066,515 | 84.7 | 30.3 | 33.9 | 39.9 | 955 | 332 | 41 | 38.2 | 19.7 |
| Philadelphia | 201,190 | 83.3 | 31.6 | 37.2 | 50.4 | 1,524 | 1,008 | 64 | 41.9 | 25.8 |
| Washington | 68,925 | 95.5 | 31.7 | 37.6 | 25.6 | 1,596 | NA | 53 | 65.2 | 239 |
| Average for High poverty cities | Total 3,045,011 | 86.2 | 34.4 | 41.38 | 36.8 | 1,512 | 537.4 | 83.5 | 47.3 | 28.7 |
| For US | | | 16.6 | 33.1 | 27.8 | 495 | 276 | 48 | 68 | 41.2 |
| Ratio of High Pov Cities to US | | | 2.08 | 1.25 | 1.32 | 3.06 | 1.95 | 1.74 | .695 | 59.9 |

[1] Orfield, G., Losen, D., Wald, J., & Swanson, C., (2004). *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis,* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Statistics are for the public school district.
[2] Kids Count—Census Data Online—2000 Census-Income and Poverty, http://aecf.org/cgi-bin.
[3] Crime in the United States: 2003, Uniform Crime Reports, table 8, United States Department of Justice.
[4] Snyder, H., Puzzanchera, C., Kang, W. (2005) "Easy Access to FBI Arrest Statistics 1994–2002" Online, Available: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/ezaucr/. Arrest Statistics are for the county in which the city is located.
[5] Births per thousand females aged 15–19 from Kids Count, "Teen Births in America's Largest Cities 1990 and 2000" Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2000.
[6] Extracted from the 2000 Census PUMS—5% file.
[7] Enrollment and Graduation rates are for the Miami-Dade County district.

**Chart 1:**




Source: Extracted from the 2000 Census PUMS 5% file. Working includes those in the military.

According to the decennial census just over a quarter of youth 16 to 19 in these communities were working. That compares to 41% nationally for the same age group. Young people in high poverty cities do not have the same early access to the labor market. Transportation poses a barrier to access to employment in the suburban hubs and in the central city labor market youth are competing with immigrants and a growing number of older workers who are taking the jobs traditionally held by teenaged workers. Studies show that there is a direct benefit to early work experience for teens. Work experience in the junior/senior year adds to wages in the later teen years and to increased annual earnings through age 26 especially for those not attending four-year colleges.[4] Youngsters in high poverty communities are disadvantaged by their lack of early work exposure during the critical years when they should be building their labor market attachment, their workplace skills, and a portfolio of experiences that would allow them to progress.

Among these high poverty cities, there are districts that fail to graduate 60 to 70 percent of their students. These students without access to quality "second chance" options are destined to remain without academic credentials. Census statistics for various age categories showed that those without a high school diploma were intermittently employed throughout their early and late twenties. The employment rate for dropouts in their early twenties was only 44% compared to 60.9% for those with a high school diploma. The attachment to the labor market for dropouts in their early twenties was tenuous with only 50 percent having worked more than 3 months during the entire year of 1999.[5] For those in their late twenties without a high school diploma, the percent working remained below 50%.

The chart also highlights the disparity in employment between White and minority youth. In the chart above minority refers to Black and Hispanic youth. In general the percentage of minority youth working at the time of census in these communities was approximately 78% of that for White youth. The disparity gap narrows for youth with bachelor's degrees. However, only 14% of minority youth in these cities had graduated from a 4 year college compared to 49% of White youth. It is fairly clear that if the employment gap among the races is to be closed significant effort and resources must be directed at greatly improving the participation in post-secondary education and career training for minority youth of color.

The question, **"what's a youngster to do?"** is more than a rhetorical question. In communities with large minority populations, where fewer than 50% of the youth graduate, where only 42% of minority 20 to 24 year old dropouts find employment, and where resources for safety net and second chance programs have been dramatically reduced, how will they survive economically, form families, and participate

[4] *"The Summer Job Market for U.S. Teens 2000–2003 and the Projected Job Outlook for the Summer of 2004,"* power point presentation by Andrew Sum, Ph.D. & Iswar Khatiwada, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, June 2004.

[5] All references in this document to census statistics not otherwise cited are from extracts from the 2000 PUMS 5% file from the Decennial Census, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

constructively in civic life. The simple answer is that too many will be unsuccessful. Unless the education and labor market status of these youth dramatically improve, they will spend their adult years on the fringes of the labor market marginalized in their ability to adequately provide for their economic wellbeing or that of their families. More young people will find avenues for economic survival through illicit activity, thus reinforcing the pipeline to prison and the accompanying stigma that will exacerbate their labor market situation upon re-entry.

In 2004, CLASP surveyed nearly 200 young people from 15 high poverty cities who had dropped out of school and who were eventually re-connected to supportive alternative programs. They were asked, among other things, what they did with their time after dropping out of school and before engaging in the alternative program. Most youth were idle, unemployed, simply hanging out. Twenty eight percent (28%) were engaged in criminal or gang activity. Only 24% reported working most of the time. Fortunately, these young people found their way to comprehensive alternative programs. They responded that what they found most valuable was the caring adult support and guidance and the ability to reconnect to education. Once reconnected, 47% responded that they had post-secondary ambitions most with very specific majors in mind. Many of the youth who fall by the wayside have hopes and aspirations and their paths can be positively redirected with the appropriate guidance and support.[6] However, sustaining the funding streams to support the transformations of youth delivery systems in economically distressed communities has proven challenging for those communities engaging in such transformation efforts. Department of Labor investment in youth programming declined from $15 billion (in current dollars) in 1979 to just over $2.6 billion today.[7] The most recent federal Youth Opportunity Grant funding to high poverty urban and rural communities is being discontinued.

So, **what's a Nation to do?** For almost 2 decades, the first chance education systems in these communities have been neglected and the second chance programs have been greatly impacted by the continual retrenchment in funding. Relying solely on the slow pace of systemic education reform will almost certainly guarantee that a decade hence we will be facing greater challenges of social isolation, disparate labor market outcomes and we will be posing the same questions. To make a difference for youth in these communities several things must happen:

1. Systemic education reform and aggressive youth recovery efforts must occur in tandem. These efforts must draw from the strength and resources of the broader community to provide rich alternative learning environments, advocacy and mentoring support, and horizon extending exposure to careers and experiences that will heighten aspirations. Many communities have discovered that the State and local education dollar can be deployed to re-engage dropouts and struggling students in smaller, more supportive community-based learning environments. Communities must engage with their local districts to spark innovation in developing multiple high quality options that will keep struggling students engaged and provide "on ramps" for those who have dropped out.
2. All youth serving systems should be mandated to collaborate on the solution set and put in place accountability systems and supports such that no youth falls through the cracks. The public must demand better accountability for outcomes from youth serving systems. In communities with high levels of youth distress the education, workforce, child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems should be required to collaborate on a transition support system that tracks and supports the movement of youth through the various systems and prepares them for post-secondary success. Youth aging out of foster care and youth re-entering from incarceration should have transition plans that connect them with the services from all relevant systems. Youth councils, such as those currently mandated in the Workforce Investment Act, should serve to keep the focus on the problem and solutions and to engage stakeholders in the process.
3. Federal and State resources must flow in support of such scaled efforts creating a policy, legislative, and regulatory environment that affirms a commitment to not leave these youth behind and provides the incentives and resources, at scale, to stand behind the commitment. Efforts like the Youth Opportunity Grant which provided substantial funding to high poverty communities to build capacity and engage thousands of in-school and out-of-school youth in sustained activity, should be extended not ended.

---

[6] CLASP conducted a survey of 196 dropouts enrolled in the Youth Opportunity Program in 13 cities. The report is forthcoming in the summer 2000.

[7] Estimate provided by David Brown, National Youth Employment Coalition.

4. The realities of the job market, the workplace and the 21st century skill set needed to be competitive must factor heavily in the redesign of high schools and alternative programming. Business must play a prominent role in this redesign and in opening up the workplace to provide rich career exposure. Jobs today and in the near future are more knowledge and technology based. Success in the workplace will require the ability to analyze, quickly adapt, continually upgrade, and develop transferable skills. A dramatic shift in the secondary/post-secondary education paradigm will be required to shift from 50% dropping out to 100% graduating with these skills. Actively engaging business, secondary, post-secondary, and alternative education leaders in the school reform process can provide the impetus and support for such change.
5. Work experience, internships, and community service/service learning opportunities must be greatly expanded in these communities to provide for these youth the same level of exposure to work environments and civic opportunities as experienced by youth in more advantaged jurisdictions. Up until the passage of the Workforce Investment Act in 1998, which eliminated the summer youth program, thousands of 14 and 15 year old youth received their first exposure to work and community service through this federal funding. Over the years the summer jobs program provided communities with a vehicle for imparting work skills, college and career exposure, leadership skills, and work ethic in the early teen years. With the elimination of the summer jobs program and the constricting opportunities in the job market, young people are not developing the skills and work ethic that will be essential for labor market success in later years.
6. A national youth policy must be advanced that has among its principles the reconnection of the approximately 5 million youth[8] who are out of school and out of work and out of the labor market and societal mainstream. There is no overarching national youth policy that embraces all youth including those who have been "disconnected". Nor is there policy that frames our values, beliefs, promises and actions to be taken on behalf of all youth. National attention on this issue tends to focus on specific pieces of legislation or special target groups—gang prevention, foster care, young offenders. While this attention is much needed, these problems are vestiges of continued neglect of the larger disconnected youth problem. A more comprehensive national youth policy is needed to move the country from silo-ed fragmented interventions to more systemic, integrated solutions.

**What's a community to do?** What is happening to young people in high poverty communities, many of which are also predominantly minority communities, should be unacceptable to all segments of the community. When viewed simply as a failure of public schools, it is easy for one to point the finger and disengage from the solution. However, when viewed as a failure of the collective community to provide for the future for its youth it should serve as a call to action. Those working in the youth field are well aware of the amazing transformations that take place when young people are reconnected to supportive alternative environments. There is a growing body of evidence about effective practice and what works to restore the education and labor market pathways. Caring adult support, integrated learning environments, high quality work experience and civic engagement, in combination, have been demonstrated effective in restoring the pathways to success for youth.[9] The technology, and experience exist, but the delivery infrastructure is fragmented and fragile after years of funding decline.

High school reform and the growing pressure for accountability should serve as the impetus to community activism around these unacceptable educational and labor market outcomes in high poverty communities. The growing exposure of the educational and labor market disparities for youth of color should also sound the alarm. The community has an important role to play in creating the public will to elevate the much neglected plight of youth in poverty communities for priority attention. Community leaders and parents will need to be informed and vigilant as the high school reform efforts unfold. Reform efforts that cater to the letter of the law, instead of the intent and spirit of leaving no youth behind, may in fact exacerbate the dropout problem. Attempts to comply with high standards, high stakes test-

[8] Sum, A., Khatiwada, I., Pond, N., & Trub'skyy, M., with Fogg, N., Palma, S. (2003, January). *Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of the Nation's Out-of-School, Young Adult Populations*. Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, p. 7.

[9] James, Donna Walker (ed) (1997). *Some Things DO Make a Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Evaluations of Youth Programs and Practices*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

ing, and making average yearly progress could easily lead to the less abled and more difficult youth being pushed out or tracked to less desirable alternatives. The challenge is to deliver **all** youth to graduation with a skill set that allows them to compete on equal footing for the opportunities in the labor market. Communities, if they are to thrive, can not continue to allow the loss of young talent, potential, and energy.

What is needed is a vision for youth that is anchored in the belief that all youth should have equitable access to the promise and prosperity that America has to offer. This belief should guide our priorities, our policies and our actions as individuals in a caring community and as a Nation. It should resonate across all levels of government and at the grass roots of community service delivery. There must be a commitment to actualize that vision by making the investments at the scale needed until the education and labor market disparities for poor and minority youth dissipate. It is not just about funding. It is about rethinking systems, policies, relationships, and collective responsibility. Leadership on this issue begins with the acknowledgement that the situation that exists for youth in high poverty communities is unacceptable and that solutions must be bold, systemic, and collaborative. Every sector of the community and every youth serving system should be coalesced to be part of the solution. A solution that is two decades overdue!

## Statement of Greater Miami Service Corps

As the Executive Director of the Greater Miami Service Corps (GMSC), I am pleased to submit testimony and success stories for consideration by the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support as you consider best practices for engaging disconnected and disadvantaged youth and young people.

### Program Background

Established in 1989, Greater Miami Service Corps is a non-profit youth service organization, based in Miami-Dade County that provides out-of-school young people with the resources and services necessary to transition to independence and self-sufficiency. Program emphasis is placed on preparing young people to enter the workforce through education, paid work experience, internships, job placement and post-program follow-up and support services to ensure placement retention. A profile of our population includes youth who are either unemployed or underemployed; high school dropouts; basic skills deficient; single parents; non-custodial parents; youth with prior criminal histories and youth aged out of foster care.

GMSC, is one of 115 Service and Conservation Corps currently operating in 41 states and the District of Columbia. Corps annually enroll more than 23,000 young men and women who contribute 13 million hours of service every year. The Corps Network and its member Corps have a long and successful history in addressing the needs of disconnected and disadvantaged youth between the ages of 16 and 25.

GMSC was one of eleven programs created through a national demonstration project called the Urban Corps Expansion Project (UCEP), a joint project between The Corps Network (formerly National Association of Service and Conservation Corps) and Public/Private Ventures. The UCEP project was sought to address several unmet community needs, specifically: the need for increased community service and volunteerism; the need for involvement of young adults in addressing the physical and social conditions of their community; the need for structured, meaningful work experiences for young adults; and the need for "comprehensive educational" opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

### Service Strategy

The Greater Miami Service Corps and The Corps Network member programs use the "Corps Works" model which incorporates service as a strategy to engaging youth. This service model was research validated by Abt, Associates and Brandeis University in 1997. The model incorporates subsidized community based work experience, which simulates a real-world work environment. Specifically, in order to prepare for future work and success in family and community life, youth enter a 6–12 month, comprehensive work-based learning program. Youth spend the bulk of each week, Monday through Thursday working in crews on service projects under the guidance of trained adult supervisors. Service projects provide numerous work-based learning opportunities rooted in reading and language comprehension, mathematics and critical thinking. These activities not only provide valuable work experience but also enhance literacy levels among youth. Projects also provide opportuni-

ties for teamwork, communication as well as good safety practices. Projects may be production based and as such carry deadline-driven services creating an environment similar to what youth will experience in other employment settings. The skills attained by youth are varied by region but may include building and lawn maintenance, child development, construction, clerical/office support and experience in the health care industry. These projects save taxpayers money and provide meaningful work for young people who will graduate our program with marketable skills.

To address employment barriers directly (in addition to the crew-based work experience), youth devote time (at least six hours per week or more) to individualized education in pursuit of a high school diploma, GED or remediation for those who have diplomas. Whenever possible, youth are enrolled in community college classes to build the habits and expectations of post-secondary education.

In addition to providing help with academics and work experience, youth have numerous opportunities to demonstrate leadership. Leadership opportunities offered include attendance at Board meetings, community presentations, team captain, Corps Senate, leadership development and business training.

In return for their efforts, Corpsmembers receive a living allowance, classroom training to improve basic competencies, a chance to earn a GED or high school diploma, experiential and environmental service-learning-based education, generic and technical skills training, a wide range of support services, and, in many cases, an AmeriCorps post-service educational award of up to $4,725.

This best practice model informs the community that the Greater Miami Service Corps develops young people to succeed. More than 70% of Corpsmembers who complete the rigorous program are placed in jobs. An additional group of Corpsmembers, return to school or go on to college and an additional group join the military.

**Funding Picture**

The services provided by GMSC remain as critical today as they did in 1989. Continuing articles published by the Miami-Herald and the Sun-Sentinel on youth violence, low graduation rates, increased poverty and the continuing dilemma of babies having babies demonstrate the need for increased funding of youth programs that target disadvantaged youth. However, funding for services locally remains unstable. Continued decreases in state Workforce Investment Act funding as well as the impact to revenue generated through property taxes to the County and local municipalities creates a tremendous impact to the number of youth that can receive services.

Since 2002, we have seen a decline in the number of youth our program serves annually, from 425 to approximately 200. At the same time, the number of youth eligible for services continues to increase. A June 13th article in the Miami Herald indicates that "fewer than 50% of students in Miami-Dade earned a high school diploma." Overall, Florida's 60.5% graduation rate is 45th in the country, out of 50 states and the District of Columbia. Without the resources for programs like the Greater Miami Service Corps, many of these young people will face a dismal future of low wages due to low education and skill levels.

In order to ensure that our youth and young people receive basic services, many programs have formed collaborations to address youth barriers to employment such as transportation, childcare, housing, tutoring, etc. But so much more is needed. Attached are success stories of local youth who were formerly considered "disadvantaged and disconnected." In order to engage the increased number of youth that are unable to access services due to limited funding, federal and state funds must be increased to make it possible for youth to participate in drop-out reconnection programs. Funding sources to consider include Youth Opportunity Grants, Public Land Corps and Department of Labor Offender Re-entry and Youthbuild funding. It is important that foundations are part of the conversation for funding support in to developing a pathway to youth for industry specific jobs.

Received via email January 11, 2007

Ms Dorsett:

First of all I wanted to let you know how nice was to see you last Tuesday; it's been a while since I graduate from the GMSC and all the memories I have from you guys are nothing but good ones.

Thanks to all your staff and your attention to detail has changed many lives in the community; I'm the living example that if you believe in yourself and take the opportunities that you offer you will be able to success in life.

While I was in the program I had the opportunity to work with Miami Dade housing agency and six months later I was a full time employee for the county, I've could

stop right there but then I thought that if I got that far I could've go even further and I did.

I decided to join the Navy so I can have a back up to complete my education. It worked.

It's not easy to be away from family and friends but at the same time I've become a better person, a stronger leader, a warrior. I've been in more than 15 countries in less than two years!!!

Thank you for all the opportunities that you gave me; I have no words to explain how much I appreciate all your help, I couldn't get this far If I wouldn't go to GMSC.

God bless you for giving people a new hope and a new way to see the real world, it is never to late to study some of us wasted time but thanks to programs like the one you offer helps communities to put young people in the right track for their future.

Once again thank you for show me that there's a future if you really fight for your goals, now I'm able not just to support myself but my family as well; I'm even in the process to buy a house.

GOD BLESS YOU AND ALL THE STAFF!!!

Very respectfully

Petty Officer Hernandez, U.S NAVY
PS3 HERNANDEZ, EMILIO
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
USS LEYTE GULF (CG–55)
FPO AE 09570–1175

---

Received via email 3/20/2007

I use to be in the Greater Miami Service Corp, a long time ago. I am glad to see that it is still around. The corps helped me get my High School Diploma from Lindsay Technical school. I am 32 years old now, so a lot has happen since, but if it was not for the corps setting my sails right, I would have not been on my way.

After I left the corps I moved into my own apt and got a permanent job with the Dade County providing subsidized housing for low income families. I had great aspirations, I wanted greater things in life so I left that job and joined the U.S.A.F. in September of 1996. Since then I have traveled to Spain, Ireland, Oman, Iraq, Afghanistan, Guam, Hawaii, 23 of the 48 contiguous states, and just recently Japan. I have driven a 800 horsepower car down a drag strip, eaten culturally unique cuisine from every country I visited, met more celebrities then I can remember and own a driveway full of cars that makes my dad jealous. Now I am a Staff Sergeant in the Air Force and my job is to monitor my Squadron of 100 people ensuring persons, equipment and aircraft move on time off the airfield. I am writing this letter to you so maybe you can read it to those young people maybe it can inspire them to stick with the program just a little bit longer.

Thank you

SSgt Juan D. Hernandez
Kadena Air Base Japan, U.S.A.F.

---

**GREATER MIAMI SERVICE CORPS**

**Elmer Garcia** is the third member of his family to attend and graduate from GMSC. After relocating from Guatemala, he was uncertain of what he should do. When he first arrived, his Mom told him about the Greater Miami Service Corps. However, he decided to work for an oriental trading company. After three years without opportunities for advancement, he decided to try the Corps. While enrolled, he earned his general education diploma, increased his English literacy and obtained full-time employment through an internship placement with Energy Programs Division of Miami-Dade County Community Action Agency. He states, "As a result of the program, I am now enrolled in Miami-Dade College to pursue an Associates Degree in Business Administration. The Corps helped put me on the path to achieve my goals."

**SUCCESS STORIES**

**Linda Eugene** came to the Greater Miami Service Corps six months after relocating from Haiti. She states, "My primary reason for joining was to benefit from the scholarships." After completing her twelve month tenure, she continued in

school full-time and worked on a part-time basis. In 1999, she earned her Associate in Arts; in 2002 she attained her Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration. She did not stop there . . . in 2004 she earned a Masters in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting. She now works full-time with the Tax Collectors Office and teaches English as a Second Language (ESOL) on a part-time basis.

When **Gladis Chacon's** grandfather died, her world changed. She and her siblings found themselves on the verge of homelessness. Due to the age of her siblings, they were placed in foster care. Since she was twenty and too old for foster care, Gladis moved into a shelter. That's when a counselor referred her to the Greater Miami Service Corps. She states, "It was my first real job situation and I could not believe that I was accepted, it was like oh my God they want me?" After twelve months Gladis graduated. She is now gainfully employed with the Miami-Dade County Community Action Agency; she has an apartment and is now working toward obtaining her general education diploma. She states, "The most important thing I learned is that it's important to be strong and never give up."

**Willie Scott,** a young father of three, wanted to make a difference in his life and that of his children. A family friend referred him to the Greater Miami Service Corps. After joining the Corps, Willie quickly demonstrated his leadership ability through his designation as Team Captain. In his role as Team Captain, he was able to learn managerial and administrative skills. Upon program completion, Willie obtained full-time employment with South Miami Hospital, a Baptist Health South Florida affiliate. Willie states, "Greater Miami Service Corps. . . ."

Born in Port au Prince Haiti, **Sophonie Slaughter** came to the United States with her mother at a young age. Her Mom worked hard to make a life for the two of them; however, shortly after arriving in the United States; "Sophie" as she is affectionately known, found out her Mom was gravely ill. When she was in the fourth grade, her Mom passed away and she was placed in foster care.

Over the years, she would move from foster home to foster home; until she was finally adopted while in the seventh grade. Even at a young age, Sophie never allowed her personal situation to stop her from pursuing her dreams. She enjoyed helping people and always dreamed of one day becoming a nurse.

When she turned 18, she decided to move into her own apartment. During that period she continued working on her education and received her High School Diploma from Miami Jackson Senior High School. She also became the mother of two children.

One day, Sophie observed some young people in the community in orange and khaki uniforms. She walked up to one of them and queried about the program they were working with. They shared with her the opportunities at the Community Action Agency/Greater Miami Service Corps. She was excited about what she heard and spoke with her case manager at the Children's Home Society. Her case manager provided her a referral and she enrolled in the Community Action Agency/Greater Miami Service Corps (CAA/GMSC).

While enrolled in the program, she completed her education at Nursing Unlimited; receiving certificates as a Home Health Aide and Nursing Assistant. She also received numerous certificates for leadership, attendance and ethics from CAA/GMSC. As a result of her desire to become a nurse, she was placed on internship at Baptist Health South Florida-South Miami Hospital where she received CPR and Basic Life Support training and work experience in patient care transportation. Sophie recently commenced the employment process with the Hospital. Sophie states, "Without the help from the Corps and the Hospital, I would not be able to attain my dreams."

Sophie's story is a testament to many young people who are just looking for an opportunity to improve their lives.

## Statement of the Honorable Rubén Hinojosa, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas

Chairman McDermott, Ranking Member Weller, and Colleagues:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit a statement into the record of your hearing on disconnected and disadvantaged youth. I congratulate the Subcommittee for shining a light on the challenges facing our nation's disconnected and disadvantaged youth. In my position as Chairman of the Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness Subcommittee of the Education and Labor Committee, the segment of our nation's youth and young adult population that is disconnected from school and work is also of great concern to me.

I am pleased to focus my statement today on youth experiencing homelessness. I congratulate the Chairman for including this population of young people within the scope of your hearing, as they are often overlooked in the national conversation taking place about "disconnected youth." In my opinion, there is no more obvious indicator of disconnection than the lack of a safe place to live.

Our nation's homeless youth are exposed to some of the harshest elements imaginable. They are exposed to the harsh elements of hot and cold weather. They are exposed to the harsh elements of crime, abuse, and exploitation on the street. They are vulnerable to illness and physical trauma. They are deprived of the protective and nurturing elements that come with a home and a strong, supportive family. They are robbed of the supports necessary for productive adulthood.

The National Network for Youth has launched a nation campaign called "A Place to Call Home Campaign." This bold initiative is of critical importance to our nation. It asserts that no young person should have to suffer the fate of being "thrown away" by society—cast out and cast aside without a place to call home. It calls upon all sectors of society to assure permanency—lasting connections to people, places to live and opportunities and supports—for our nation's homeless youth.

Congress must do its part. That is why I have am planning to introduce the Place to Call Home Act, which will ensure that federal policy creates solutions rather than barriers for homeless youth.

I am working with the National Network for Youth to convert the goals of the Campaign into policies that we can enact through federal legislation. We need a comprehensive approach—one that identifies all of our agencies and congressional committees that can help mend the social safety net that is torn for homeless youth. Our bill will improve programs and remove barriers to services for homeless and other disconnected youth in permanent housing, in healthcare, in secondary education, higher education, job training, juvenile justice, and child welfare. It will be called the Place to Call Home Act. I plan to introduce it in July, in time for the commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the enactment of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, Congress's first comprehensive responsive to mass homelessness in our nation.

Among the bill's provisions of interest to the Ways and Means Committee, the Place to Call Home Act will:

- Expand eligibility for federal foster care and adoption assistance to youth through age 20.
- Expand eligibility for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, including room and board and education and training vouchers, to youth under the age of 25.
- Increase the mandatory spending levels of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program to $505 million, and the Chafee program to $200 million.
- Eliminate the income eligibility requirement for federal foster care and adoption assistance.
- Authorize maintenance payments for kinship guardianship assistance to foster care children and youth.
- Prohibit states from enacting policies or practices to place a family within the child welfare system on the sole or primary basis that the family is experiencing homelessness.
- Require states, as a condition of receiving foster care maintenance payments, to have policies and procedures designed to reduce children and youth in their custody from running from their placement.
- Require states, as a condition of receiving foster care maintenance payments, to have policies and procedures designed to ensure that children and youth in their custody are discharged in such a manner that ensures the child or youth is placed in stable and appropriate housing.
- Add homeless youth as a target group for eligibility for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Permit states to establish a "transitional compliance period" in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, whereby income-eligible minor parents who at the time of application are having trouble meeting the complex rules and eligibility conditions related to education and living arrangements (such as school dropouts and homeless youth) of the TANF program are nevertheless allowed to receive assistance on the condition that they comply with the minor parent rules within an established period after enrollment.
- Ensure that states provide alternative living arrangements for minor parents seeking TANF assistance and unable to live at home, and to consult with minor parents about their preferred living arrangement.

- End restrictions on states' ability to count participation in vocational and post-secondary training as a strategy for helping parents, including teen parents, attain access to better jobs. Allow 24 months for such participation.
- Commence the lifetime limit on TANF assistance for teen parents completing their education and training programs when they turn age 20, rather than when they turn age 19, in order to allow these older youth to complete their education/training without the lifetime limit clock ticking.
- Establish sanctions protections procedures that help teen parents understand, avoid, and/or end sanctions.
- Require the identification of the extent and strategies to address the unmet service and living arrangement needs of teen parents in state TANF plans.
- Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct studies of: teen parents receiving TANF assistance and to identify state and community best practices related to teen parent enrollment and tracking; teen parents not receiving TANF assistance to identify reasons for non-participation and to measure indicators of family well-being; the effects of paternity establishment policies; and, the nature, extent, and impact of sanctions imposed on parents who have not attained age 20.

The very estimate that as many as three million of our nation's youth and young adults do not have a home at some point in time each year is an obvious indication that our social safety net has begun to unravel. We need to mend that net and make it strong again. It will take all of our efforts, including that of the Ways and Means Committee, the Education and Labor Committee, and others.

I urge this Subcommittee to help me move the Place to Call Home Act forward. I hope that members of the Subcommittee will join as co-sponsors of the legislation and advance its income security and family support provisions as part of other legislation you may move through Congress this session.

This hearing is a signal of the 110th Congress's commitment to preventing and ending youth homelessness. I trust it will serve as an opportunity to mobilize the nation to make sure that every young person has a place to call home.

**Statement of National Council For Adoption**

The National Council For Adoption thanks you for the opportunity to submit this written statement for your June 19, 2007 hearing's record, on the subject of disconnected, disadvantaged and homeless youth. The National Council For Adoption (NCFA) applauds the subcommittee's focus on this vulnerable segment of American society. The chairman's and subcommittee's leadership in addressing this sad issue creates an excellent opportunity for both political parties to enact changes that will positively impact millions of Americans.

We at NCFA are aware of the myriad of ways in which early childhood difficulties and a poor environment work to undermine the personal development of hundreds of thousands of children, thus placing them at risk of growing into disconnected and disadvantaged youth. We also know of the role that funding restrictions under Title IV–E of the Social Security Act play in keeping thousands of children in foster care environments, cut off from those caretakers and role models who could provide them with the emotional and personal connections all children and youths need to become well-adjusted, contributing members of society.

In 2005, the most recent year for which statistics are available, a record 24,407 youths aged out of this nation's foster care system, never having experienced the loving, permanent family that is every child's birthright.[1] In 1998, that number was 17,310.[2] This increase is troubling. Not only is emancipation the least desirable outcome for a child entering the child welfare system, as it presupposes that the child will never be matched to a loving, permanent family. It also correlates with increased risk of poverty, homelessness, and incarceration among those exiting the system. Given these correlations, a reversal of the current trend in the numbers emancipated from foster care should be among the goals of any national strategy to reduce the number of disconnected and disadvantaged youths.

[1] *The AFCARS Report (#13): Preliminary Estimates for FY 2005*, Administration of Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. December, 2006. Available online at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats__research/afcars/tar/report13.htm

[2] *The AFCARS Report (#12): Final Estimates for FY 1998 through FY 2005*, Administration of Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. October, 2006. Available online at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats__research/afcars/tar/report12.htm

**Effects of the Child Welfare System on Foster Children**

Nearly all studies of children in foster care show that they experience higher than average rates of behavioral, emotional, academic, mental and physical difficulties. This pattern is observed even when children in the child welfare system are compared to demographically similar children who have remained outside the system. For example, the first national overview of the well-being of children in the child welfare system, which drew on data from the 1997 and 1999 National Surveys of America's Families, found that 27 percent of children involved with the child welfare system ages 6 through 17 had "high levels of behavioral and emotional problems." This compares to 7 percent of all children ages 6 through 17, and 13 percent of children in "high-risk parent care." This same overview found that 28 percent of all children involved with the child welfare system had "limiting physical, learning, or mental health conditions," relative to 7 percent of all children and 14 percent of children in "high-risk parent care."[3]

There are two obvious, and by no means mutually exclusive, explanations for this. One is that whatever incident of abuse or neglect precipitates the child's entry into the foster care system negatively affects the development of that child for years afterward. The other is that the individual's stay in the child welfare system, oftentimes moving from one foster home or foster care facility to another with little opportunity to form lasting personal bonds, is detrimental to his or her development. Both these factors are most likely at work in the majority of cases.

A foster child who is ultimately reunited with his or her original and rehabilitated family, or placed in a permanent, loving adoptive family, can be said to have received a second chance at life—complete with the opportunity to heal, which only a loving, stable family can provide. This is not the case for those who age out, however. The difficulties reported above, disproportionately common among all children involved with child welfare services, persist among those who are neither reunited with their original families nor adopted.

**Socioeconomic Outcomes for Children Who Age Out of Foster Care**

A three-state study of former foster youths, aged 19, who had been emancipated from the system found significant deficits in education, poorer economic situations, and rates of delinquent or violent behavior compared to a nationally representative sample of youths, aged 19, studied as a part of the most recent National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (NLSAH).[4]

Thirty-seven percent of former foster youth had neither a high school diploma nor a GED at the time of the study, compared to 9 percent of the NLSAH sample. Also, 24 percent of former foster youth were enrolled at the time of their study in a two or four year college program, compared to 56 percent of those surveyed in the NLSAH sample.

Ten percent of former foster youths who reported any income from employment in the past year earned $10,000 or more, versus 21 percent of those in the NLSAH sample who reported earning any income from employment in the previous year. Furthermore, former foster youths were significantly more likely than those in the NLSAH sample to report having been unable to pay their rent or mortgage (12 percent vs. 6 percent) and utilities (12 percent vs. 7 percent), as well as to having been evicted (4 percent versus .8 percent) in the previous year. Perhaps most telling is the fact that 31 percent of former foster youths reported not being in school and not having a job at the time of the study, compared to 12 percent of those in the NLSAH sample.

In regard to delinquent and violent behavior, both males and females in the former foster youth sample were significantly more likely to report having pulled a knife or gun on someone (8 percent of males, 4 percent of females) than those in the NLSAH sample (3 percent of males, less than 1 percent of females). In addition, 28 percent of former foster youths reported having been arrested, and 19 percent reported having been incarcerated during the past year. This compares dismally to the 0.6 percent of all Americans aged 18–19 who have *ever* been incarcerated, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Justice.[5] Finally, nearly 50 percent of young

---

[3] Kortenkamp, J. & Ehrle, J. *The Well-Being of Children Involved with the Child Welfare System,* January 2002, The Urban Institute. Available online at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310413_anf_b43.pdf

[4] Courtney, Mark E. et al, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19,* May 2005, Chapin Hall. Available online at http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1355

[5] Bonczar, Thomas P., *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population: 1974–2001*, August, 2003, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Available online at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/piusp01.pdf

women formerly in foster care reported having been pregnant at least once by age 19, compared to 20 percent of young women in the NLSAH sample.

In short, young men and women who age out of the foster care system work less, earn less, are undereducated, and are more likely to engage in criminal and delinquent behavior, relative to their peers. These facts speak to a continuing disconnection from society among youths who age out of the foster care system.

**Flexible Funding under Title IV–E of the Social Security Act: Necessary to Successful Reform**

Current federal funding legislation prevents the type of reform needed to reduce the number of emancipated youths. Title IV–E federal dollars are, by far, the largest source of child welfare services funding. Sixty-one percent of this funding, however, is earmarked for foster care maintenance services at the expense of other crucial child welfare services that would allow these youths to find the permanency the deserve. States therefore have a clear financial incentive to move children into foster care, and no such incentive to move them out. As a result, the system falls asleep on the foster care button, and children in need of loving, permanent families are left in a government-financed limbo instead.

With this in mind, National Council For Adoption would like to make the following recommendations to Congress aimed at increasing the flexibility of federal child welfare funds to better provide for America's neglected and abused children.

- Reassess the child welfare priorities and reallocate resources so as to give more emphasis and funding to the crucial, but neglected strategy of adoptive and foster parent recruitment;
- Extend the flexibility of the Promoting Safe & Stable Families (Title IV–B, Subpart 2) funding to Title IV–E funding. This would allow states to decide how best to use federal dollars on community-based family support services, family preservation services, time-limited family reunification services, adoptive and foster parent recruitment and training, post-placement services for adoptive and foster families, and adoption promotion and support services, to meet the needs of children in their care;
- Allow states to project their annual expenditures for foster care maintenance (Title IV–E) over a specified period of time. The difference between the state's projected expenditures and the state's actual expenditures are the savings that states may consolidate with their Title IV–B funding to use for other child welfare purposes such as those stated above. States would continue to be required to match their federal savings at their foster care matching rates to ensure that states continue their share of spending for child welfare purposes; and
- Reauthorize the federal child welfare waivers allowing HHS to grant new waivers to 10 states to allow them to use their Title IV–E dollars for other child welfare services not covered by Title IV–E such as post-permanency services to support and strengthen adoptive families. Successful Title IV–E waiver demonstrations in North Carolina, Indiana, Oregon and other states have proven that programs allowing states to use previously restricted, foster care maintenance dollars to underwrite other child welfare services can and do work.

There are currently 114,000 children in foster care whose parental rights have been terminated. Under the current federal financing system, a substantial portion of these children will simply age out of foster care. However, a shift in child welfare funding away from foster care maintenance and toward the placement of these children with loving, permanent families would work to decrease the numbers aging out of foster care and, by extension, the number of disconnected and disadvantaged youths.

In conclusion, Chairman McDermott and other members of the subcommittee, National Council For Adoption would like to thank you for the opportunity to present this proposal to reduce the numbers of disconnected and disadvantaged youths in the United States. We offer our continued assistance in advancing this crucial mission.

**Statement of National Human Services Assembly**

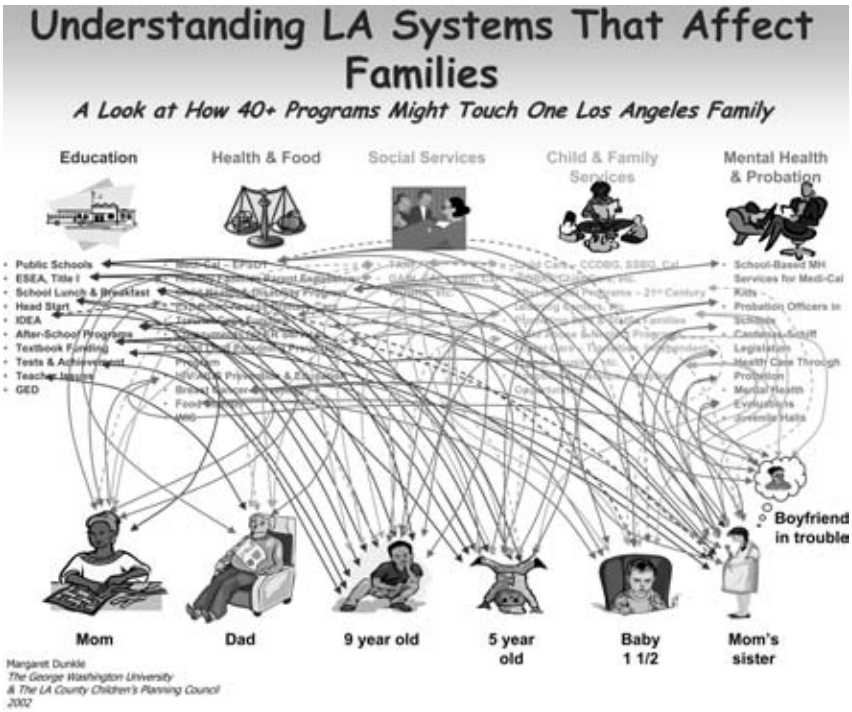
We, members of the National Human Services Assembly and the National Collaboration for Youth, commend this Subcommittee for the work it does on behalf of

our nation's most vulnerable, and for seeking solutions by holding this hearing on disconnected youth.

The National Human Services Assembly, founded in 1923, is an association of the nation's leading national non-profits in the fields of community and youth development, and human services. Many of the member organizations are national offices of direct human service providers. Others conduct research or provide technical assistance.

The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a 33-year old affinity group, is a coalition of the National Assembly member organizations that have a significant interest in youth development. Members of NCY include 50 national, non-profit, youth development organizations that collectively serve more than 40 million young people; employ over 100,000 paid staff; utilize more than six million volunteers; and have a physical presence in virtually every community in America. Its mission is to provide a united voice as advocates for youth to improve the conditions of young people in America, and to help young people reach their full potential.

While many NCY members look to serve all young people, many of our organizations have a focus on reaching the most at-risk youth. As research demonstrates, and the graphic [1] included in this testimony indicates, children, youth, their families and caregivers often have multiple needs and are eligible for a variety of services funded through existing federal programs. It is often difficult, however, for service providers, young people and their families to access opportunities provided by different agencies.




For more than 3 years, NCY members have been working on a piece of legislation specifically designed to untangle this mass of services and create a seamless web of support for at-risk young people. The Tom Osborne Federal Youth Coordination Act (PL 109–365, Title VIII), passed at the end of the 109th Congress, but has yet to receive the modest $1 million in funding necessary to begin the work of the Federal Youth Development Council.

[1] Dunkle, M. (2002). *Understanding LA Systems That Affect Families: A Look at How 40+ Programs Might Touch One Los Angeles Family.* The George Washington University and The LA County Children's Planning Council.

The original legislation, H.R. 856, passed the House in November 2005 by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 353 to 62, with 163 Republicans supporting it, and no Democrats opposing. In fact, we remain grateful for the support of both the Chair and Ranking Member of this subcommittee for their votes that day.

If implemented, the Federal Youth Development Council would play a vital role in increasing the coordination, cooperation, and efficiency among the twelve federal departments and myriad agencies that provide services to disadvantaged youth. This new interagency Council, and its focus on youth development, will result in considerable benefits for young people by providing youth with a more accessible and comprehensive array of services.

In addition to ensuring improved communication and coordination among federal departments and agencies, the Council will

- Assess the needs of youth and those who work with youth; and the quantity and quality of federal programs offering services, supports and opportunities to help meet these needs.
- Recommend objectives and quantifiable goals for federal youth programs and recommend allocation of resources to support the goals.
- Identify overlap or duplication and recommend ways to better facilitate coordination, improve efficiency and effectiveness of such programs.
- Identify target populations of youth and focus additional resources or develop demonstration projects and model programs to target those groups.
- Conduct research and evaluation, identify and replicate model programs and promising practices, provide technical assistance relating to the needs of youth, and coordinate the collection and dissemination of youth-services related data and research.
- Provide technical assistance to states to support state-funded youth coordinating councils.

Additionally, the Council will report to Congress with an assessment of the needs of youth and those who serve them, including recommendations for better integration and coordination of federal, state, and local policies affecting youth.

The composition of the Council is unique—it acknowledges that government alone cannot provide all the solutions needed. Membership on the Council includes nongovernmental youth development organizations and disadvantaged youth. The importance of this design, inclusive of all representative stakeholders and expressly authorized in the Act, cannot be overstated.

Organizations, such as ours, are essential partners in providing programming to at-risk youth, and can provide valuable insight as to how increased communication and coordination at the federal level will have a direct impact toward improved services at the local and state level. Furthermore, our nation's young people are more than capable of articulating the efficacy of policies and programs. As recipients of services provided by the federal government they are in the ideal position to assist the Council as it moves forward, and by serving on the council, youth members might also gain the propensity toward a future career in public service.

While certainly the Federal Youth Development Council cannot provide all the solutions that this Subcommittee is seeking, we do believe that it is an integral and important part of a system to better serve and engage our nation's future leaders.

Thank you for your time and attention. Any of the undersigned would be happy to answer questions you might have, and assist your Subcommittee as it works towards finding solutions.

---

Afterschool Alliance, Jodi Grant, Executive Director
Alliance for Children and Families, Peter Goldberg, President and CEO
America's Promise Alliance, Marguerite Kondracke, President and CEO
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Judy Vredenburgh, President and CEO
Camp Fire USA, Jill Pasewalk, President and CEO
Child Welfare League of America, Christine James-Brown, President and CEO
Communities In Schools, Inc., Daniel J. Cardinali, President
First Focus, Bruce Lesley, President
Forum for Youth Investment, Karen J. Pittman, Executive Director
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, Gail Manza, Executive Director
National Collaboration for Youth, Irv Katz, President and CEO
National Network for Youth, Victoria Wagner, President and CEO
National Recreation and Park Association, John A. Thorner, Executive Director
The Salvation Army, USA, Commissioner Israel L. Gaither
Search Institute, Peter Benson, President
United Neighborhood Centers of America, Ian Bautista, President

YMCA of the USA, Neil Nicoll, President and CEO
Youth Service America, Steven A. Culbertson, President and CEO

## Statement of the National Network for Youth

### Introduction

**The National Network for Youth (NN4Y), founded in 1974, is a national nonprofit membership organization that champions the needs of runaway, homeless, and other disconnected youth through advocacy, innovation and member services.** NN4Y is committed to ensuring that opportunities for development and permanency be made available to youth who face greater odds due to abuse, neglect, exploitation, homelessness, lack of resources, community prejudice, differing abilities, barriers to learning, and other life challenges. NN4Y provides its members and the general public education, networking, training, materials and policy advocacy with federal, state, and local lawmakers. NN4Y maintains offices in Seattle, Washington, and in Washington, DC.

**Today our membership includes more than 500 community-based, faith-based, and public organizations that provide an array of services to youth and families in the United States and territories as well as some international locations.** Many of our members receive funding through the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. NN4Y's organization members provide the full gamut of preventive, interventive, and developmental supports to youth and families in high-risk situations, including street-based crisis intervention, emergency shelter, transitional and independent housing, permanent housing, individual and family counseling, lifeskills, parenting, and health and wellness education, physical and mental health treatment and care, supplemental educational, workforce development, arts, and recreation services. Collectively, NN4Y member organizations serve over 2.5 million youth annually. In addition, youth, youth workers, and regional and state networks of youth-serving organizations belong to NN4Y.

**By any measure of disconnection, runaway and homeless youth certainly fall within its scope. It is this group of young people about which this statement is focused.**

### Runaway and Homeless Youth Basics

**Runaway and homeless youth are the most vulnerable of our nation's "disconnected" youth.** The National Network for Youth refers to these two populations collectively as "unaccompanied youth." Like other disconnected youth, unaccompanied youth experience separation from one or more of the key societal institutions of family, school, community, and the workplace. Their disconnection is accentuated by their lack of a permanent place to live, which is not only disruptive in and of itself, but also indicative of the larger socioeconomic instability they are experiencing.

**Between one million and three million of our nation's youth experience an unaccompanied situation annually**, according to various estimates derived from government studies and data sets. Some of these estimates do not include young adults ages 18 and older within their scope.

**Unaccompanied youth become detached from parents, guardians and other caring adults—legally, economically, and emotionally—due to a combination of family and community stressors.**

Family Stressors—Many of our nation's unaccompanied youth are compelled to leave their home environments prematurely due to severe family conflict, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse by an adult in the home, parental neglect, parental substance abuse, or parental mental illness. For other youth, the values and traditions with which their families operate prescribe that the young person separate economically from the family unit upon reaching the legal age of majority or after graduation, in some cases regardless of whether the youth is actually prepared for independent adulthood. Others are expelled from the home due to parental inability to accept the sexual orientation, parenting status, mental or addictive disability, or normal adolescent behavior of their child. For still other young people, their families are simply too poor to continue to bear the financial burden of providing for the youth's basic needs. Youth in families that are experiencing homelessness may be separated from the family unit—and become homeless on their own—so that emergency shelter or domestic violence services can be secured for the remaining family members, or to squeeze most of the family into means of habitation that are too small for all of its members.

Community Stressors—State custodial systems—including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, addiction treatment, and developmental disabilities—which have responsibility for ensuring the safety and protection of children and youth who are not properly cared for by parents and guardians—are failing in general to accept older youth into their custody due to financial limitations and policy disincentives. Many of the young people who do come in contact with public custodial systems are not adequately prepared for independence and residential stability during their period of custody nor provided an aftercare arrangement to support them after the custodial relationship has ended. Many of these young people have no home environment to which to return. Youth with mental illness, addiction, and other disabilities face discrimination when searching for an independent living arrangement.

Many unaccompanied youth who are psychosocially prepared for independent adulthood are not economically ready for self-sufficiency. Inadequate educational preparation, lack of employment skills, short or non-existent work histories, language barriers, and undocumented immigration status all contribute to the relegation of many youth to unemployment or to low-wage jobs—neither of which generate income sufficient for acquiring affordable housing.

Policy barriers also stand in the way of permanency for unaccompanied youth. In some jurisdictions, youth below the age of majority are prohibited from entering into leases or other contracts on their own behalf. "One strike" laws prohibit individuals with criminal histories from residency in public and assisted housing and prohibit juvenile ex-offenders from returning to their families. And, federal, state, and local public and assisted housing programs rank young people low, if at all, among their priority populations for assistance.

**Regardless of the causal factor, unaccompanied youth, when left to fend for themselves without support, experience poor health, educational, and workforce outcomes which imperil their prospects for positive adulthood. This results in their long-term dependency on or involvement in public health, social service, emergency assistance, and corrections systems.**

**National Network for Youth Public Policy**

The National Network for Youth was founded as the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services to be the membership association of community-based organizations that had emerged in the 1970s to focus on the needs of youth in runaway and homeless situations. NN4Y was the architect of the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) and still considers that law today as our primary public policy accomplishment. We remain vigilant over the RHYA and are the leading national organization dedicated to ensuring the Act's continuation (through the reauthorization process) and its annual federal appropriation, $103 million in federal FY 2007. **We urge Congress to increase appropriations for RHYA programs to $140 million annual. We also call on Congress to reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which is set to expire in 2008.**

Our public policy work reaches far beyond the RHYA, however. We also devote attention to ensuring that runaway, homeless, and other disconnected youth receive full and fair access to child welfare, juvenile justice, physical health, mental health, education, workforce investment, positive youth development, and housing opportunities and supports.

**Place to Call Home *and* Place to Call Home Act**

In February 2007, the National Network for Youth announced a long-term campaign to end youth homelessness at the NN4Y annual Symposium in Washington, DC in February 2007. ***A Place to Call Home: The National Network for Youth's Permanency Plan for Unaccompanied Youth*** seeks to build the conditions, structures, and supports to ensure permanency for unaccompanied youth, where permanency is understood to include a lasting connection to loving families, caring adults, and supportive peers; a safe place to live; and the youth's possession of skills and resources necessary for a life of physical and mental wellness, continuous asset-building, dignity, and joy.

The Place to Call Home Campaign will guide NN4Y's strategy and actions for the future. The Campaign involves activities in four work areas: public policy advancement and system change; practice improvement and professional development; public awareness and stakeholder education; and research and knowledge development.

The signature public policy component of the Place to Call Home Campaign is the **Place to Call Home Act**, comprehensive legislation to prevent, respond to, and end runaway and homeless situations among youth. We are currently working with Representative Rubén Hinojosa (D–TX) to develop the Place to Call Home Act. We expect the bill to be introduced in July.

The **Place to Call Home Act addresses the causal factors of and offers ultimate solutions to unaccompanied situations among youth**. The bill includes provisions in the homeless assistance, housing, child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, education, workforce investment, teen parenting, and immigration areas.

**Income Security and Family Support Provisions within Place to Call Home Act**

The Place to Call Home Act includes many provisions that address income security and family support issues within the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee. **We urge the Subcommittee to act on the recommendations below either by bringing up the Place to Call Home Act for consideration once it is introduced, by bringing up the provisions independently, or by attaching them to other income security and family support legislative vehicles.**

***Child Welfare***

State child welfare systems have the purpose of ensuring the safety and protection of children and youth who are not properly cared for by parents and guardians. We must strengthen these systems so that they provide better access by, and supports for longer periods, to homeless and other disconnected youth.

We urge Congress to **expand eligibility for federal foster care and adoption assistance to youth through age 20**. Terminating such assistance at age 18 is not in keeping with what we now know about adolescent brain development, which is that the brain does not mature to its adult capacity until the mid-20s. So essentially, by terminating assistance at age 18, we are abandoning youth at a time when they are still in great need of supervision and support.

Concurrent to an extension of eligibility for foster care to youth through age 20, we recommend Congress to **extend eligibility for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to youth under age 25**. Included in this age extension should be eligibility for room and board and for education and training vouchers. We recommend **at least a $200 million annual spending level ($60 million above current law) for the Chafee program**. We also recommend the addition of a requirement to evaluate use of Chafee room and board services and how they improve housing outcomes for youth.

We recommend that Congress **authorize maintenance payments for kinship guardianship assistance to foster care children**. Guardianship is a particularly attractive permanency option for older youth in care. Uniform federal policy and funding to states is needed in this important area.

We recommend that Congress **require states, as a condition of receiving foster care maintenance payments, to have established and functioning policies and procedures designed to reduce the numbers of children and youth in their custody from running from their placement**. Analysis of state data uncovers that 21 percent of foster youth run from placement. This places a burden on both the child welfare and youth homeless assistance systems and may lead to disciplinary action against the youth.

We urge Congress to **require states, as a condition of receiving foster care maintenance payments, to have established and functioning policies and procedures designed to ensure that children and youth in their custody are discharged in such a manner that ensures the child or youth is placed in stable and appropriate housing**. We must block the path from child welfare to homelessness for far too many of our nation's youth exiting care.

We recommend that Congress **increase from $305 million to $505 million the mandatory funding level for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program**. This is a vital account that states use to establish prevention and early intervention supports for families at risk of child removal from the home, and support to homeless families. Our nation's children and youth deserve better than to have to scrape annually for discretionary dollars for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, especially when Congress has already designated a portion of PSSF funds as mandatory spending.

We recommend that Congress **eliminate the income eligibility requirement for access to foster care and adoption assistance**. Income should not be a determining factor in a young person and their family's ability to access federal child welfare assistance. Child abuse and neglect are by no means limited to low-income families.

We urge Congress to **prohibit states from enacting policies or practices to place a family within the child welfare system on the sole or primary basis that the family is experiencing homelessness**. Lingering state practices in this regard continue to lead children and youth being separated from their family when the core issue is the family's inability to obtain a safe living arrangement for all

its members. There are more pro-social responses to the housing crisis among families than to separate children from their caregivers.

Finally, we request Congress to **authorize the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on state policies and practices with regard to access of unaccompanied youth to child protective services and to foster care and adoption assistance**. We need to understand better why when homeless youth service providers turn to the child welfare system for assistance in caring for a homeless youth, the door is too often closed.

***Temporary Assistance for Needy Families—Teen Parent Protections***

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is an essential source of income and supportive services for families in poverty, including young families. Teen parents face special barriers to accessing and utilizing the TANF program—barriers that must be dismantled.

We urge Congress to permit states to establish a "transitional compliance period," **whereby income-eligible minor parents** who at the time of application are having trouble meeting the complex rules and eligibility conditions related to education and living arrangements (such as school dropouts and homeless youth) of the TANF program are nevertheless **allowed to receive assistance on the condition that they comply with the minor parent rules within an established period after enrollment.**

We recommend Congress to **ensure that states consult with minor parents about their preferred living arrangement**. We urge Congress to **ensure the appropriate provision of alternative living arrangements for minor parents unable to live at home**. This should include identifying transitional living youth projects for older homeless youth funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) as a type of alternative living arrangement.

We recommend that Congress **end restrictions on states' ability to count participation in vocational and post-secondary training as a strategy for helping parents, including teen parents, attain access to better jobs**. Twenty-four months should be allowed for such participation.

While we oppose the lifetime ban on TANF assistance, given that it is part of current law, we at least ask Congress to **commence the lifetime limit on TANF assistance for teen parents completing their education and training programs when they turn age 20, rather than when they turn age 19**, in order to allow these older youth to complete their education/training without the lifetime limit clock ticking.

We recommend that Congress **establish procedures that help teen parents understand, avoid, and/or end sanctions**.

**States should be required to identify the extent of and strategies to address the unmet service and living arrangement needs of teen parents in state TANF plans.**

And the **Secretary of Health and Human Services should be required to conduct studies of: teen parents** receiving TANF assistance and to identify state and community best practices related to teen parent enrollment and tracking; teen parents not receiving TANF assistance to identify reasons for non-participation and to measure indicators of family well-being; the effects of paternity establishment policies; and, the nature, extent, and impact of sanctions imposed on parents who have not attained age 20.

***Work Opportunity Tax Credit***

Congress should **add homeless youth as a target group for eligibility for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit**. Currently, youth living in Enterprise Communities and Empowerment Zones are eligible for the WOTC. This category needs to be expanded. "Homeless youth" for purposes of WOTC should be defined as an individual not less than age 16 and not more than age 24 and otherwise having the same meaning as "homeless child and youth" under federal education law.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for considering our views and recommendations. We hope the Committee on Ways and Means and the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support will join us in our campaign to ensure a Place to Call Home for all our nation's youth.

## Statement of National YouthBuild Coalition

### Introduction

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for allowing me to submit this statement for the record. Thank you for holding this important hearing.

I belong to various organizations and task forces that have developed and will submit broad sets of policy and funding recommendations to address the range of issues affecting disconnected youth. Therefore, knowing that you will receive such recommendations from elsewhere, in this testimony submitted as chairperson of the National YouthBuild Coalition, I will focus simply on the powerful potential role of the federal YouthBuild program as part of the solution to the crisis of disconnected youth.

We recommend that Congress seize the leadership role in taking YouthBuild to full scale: Bring it to every community that is calling for it, open the doors to all the young people who are knocking, eliminate waiting lists of both youth and of community-based organizations eager to implement YouthBuild in America's poorest communities. Within five years YouthBuild could grow from 8,000 youth per year in 226 communities to 50,000 youth in 850 communities, producing beautiful housing and proud young leaders, eager to make a difference, rebuilding their own lives and their own communities.

### YouthBuild Description and History

YouthBuild is a national youth and community development program that simultaneously addresses the key issues facing low-income communities: housing, education, employment, crime prevention, community service, and leadership development.

In YouthBuild programs, sponsored primarily by community-based non-profit organizations, low-income disconnected young people ages 16–24 enroll full-time for 6 to 24 months. They work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning construction job skills by building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. A strong emphasis is placed on leadership development, personal counseling, positive values, community service, and personal responsibility. The members belong to a positive mini-community in which students and teachers are committed to each other's success. They take pride in the housing they produce.

YouthBuild students go through a process of personal transformation that has been documented by independent researchers to result in a radical change in the students' attitudes and future aspirations, coupled with acquisition of skills that enable them to move on to careers and post-secondary education. We also see graduates getting married, buying homes, and caring well for their children.

YouthBuild began in Chairman Rangel's East Harlem district in 1978. It was replicated in New York City and across the country before being authorized as a federal program in 1992 under the jurisdiction of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Since 1994, when HUD YouthBuild funds first reached communities, more than 68,000 YouthBuild students have produced 16,000 units of low-income housing. Today, there are 226 YouthBuild programs in 42 states, engaging approximately 8,000 young adults each year in America's poorest urban, rural and tribal communities.

In September, 2006, at the recommendation of the Bush Administration, YouthBuild was transferred by unanimous consent in Congress to the jurisdiction of the US Department of Labor. The National YouthBuild Coalition of nearly 1,000 organizations cooperated with this move in the hope that it was the precursor to a major expansion that would use YouthBuild's proven approach to reconnect more of America's lost youth.

### Need:

I don't need to belabor just how dire is the need to reconnect America's under-educated and unemployed youth. A few statistics released recently at a national summit on dropouts tell the grim story:

- More than one million American high school students leave high school every year without a diploma.
- Nearly half of all African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans fail to graduate with their high school classes.
- 1.7 million low income youth are both out of school and out of work, likely to be the parents of the next generation raised in poverty and despair.
- Another 225,000 are in prison.

A major federal intervention is desperately needed. Every effective program should be immediately taken to full scale; and every community should be mobilized to address this problem in a cohesive fashion. The problem is finite and can be solved. YouthBuild is ready with a track record and the infrastructure to grow quickly as part of a national mobilization.

**YouthBuild Demographics and Outcomes**

YouthBuild students are the very disconnected and disadvantaged youth who are the focus of this hearing. They are detached from school and work. 91 percent are high school dropouts; 72 percent are young men; 48% are African American, 22% Latino, 22% White, 3% Native American; 33% have been adjudicated, 10% in foster care; 30% have been homeless. They are both urban and rural. Twenty-six percent are already young parents themselves.

YouthBuild programs have demonstrated the principles and practices that work to reconnect most youth and to create pathways to higher education, careers, and citizenship. What we have learned is that every disconnected youth is yearning to become somebody that other people will welcome and respect, and if given the right conditions they will transform their own lives and play a constructive role in society.

The 226 existing YouthBuild programs, all based on the same philosophy and model, have been highly successful. Although 91 percent of the students were previously high school dropouts and all of them are poor, nearly 70 percent complete the program, and 71 percent of graduates go on to college or jobs earning an average of nearly $9 an hour. The recidivism rate for graduates previously convicted of a felony is less than 24 percent, compared to 67 percent nationwide.

Imagine the social and economic impact across the country of simultaneously helping 70 percent of high school dropouts complete their GED or diploma while drastically reducing the recidivism rate of youthful offenders to just 24 percent!

**Demand**:

The challenge for the YouthBuild network is quite simply this: We have only enough resources to serve a fraction of the young people who seek a second chance, in this nation that believes in second chances. Each year YouthBuild programs turn away 14,000 youth for lack of funds: 800 in North Philadelphia, 500 in Harlem, 400 in Newark, 800 in Madison, and so on. Furthermore, over 1,000 community-based organizations have applied to HUD since 1994 to bring this proven and inspiring program to their neighborhoods. Over 600 traveled to DC for DOL's first YouthBuild bidders' conference this month. DOL only has funds for 100.

**Recommendation**:

Congress should establish a five-year plan in partnership with DOL and YouthBuild USA, to expand the federal YouthBuild program to full scale. This successful network could grow through a planned five year growth process from 8,000 low-income, disadvantaged youth in 226 communities to 50,000 youth in 850 communities.

The federal YouthBuild program has developed a public/private partnership that has coupled the long-term commitment, knowledge, and leveraged resources of YouthBuild USA with the know-how and capacity of several federal agencies. The federal government has built the infrastructure with an investment of $650M; YouthBuild USA has brought $114M into the mix; and local YouthBuild programs have raised over $1B of matching funds. Together we have the knowledge, infrastructure, commitment, capacity, and demand to do this within five years. It would take a steady annual increase to an appropriation of $1B in the fifth year, at an annual cost per full-time youth participant of $20,000. This includes a $5,000 stipend for each youth to compensate for their hard work and service producing affordable housing.

Part of this growth plan should include a federal incentive for states to join in, by offering a 50% federal match for every adjudicated young person funded by any state government to participate in YouthBuild programs as a diversion or re-entry program. In Wisconsin, California, and Newark state governments have already noticed YouthBuild and begun to invest in it as a re-entry program. States could save millions by lowering the recidivism rates through YouthBuild.

**How YouthBuild Works: The Formula to "Flip the Script"**

YouthBuild is not the only program that works. It is, however, the only national program that reaches a highly disadvantaged population with a comprehensive community-based program that puts equal emphasis and commits equal time to education and job training, that offers job training in the form of creating a profoundly valuable community service, and that is committed to teaching leadership skills and

values through engaging the young people in helping to develop the policies that affect them. There are precious few pipelines for low-income youth to become good citizens, to take on active leadership roles in their communities.

The formula to do what the young people call "flip the script" of their lives, taking them from a negative direction to a positive direction, includes all of the following elements:

- a way for young adults to resume their **education** toward a high school diploma and college
- **skills training** toward decent-paying jobs
- an **immediate visible role contributing to the community** that earns respect from family and neighbors
- **stipends or wages** to support themselves and their children
- **personal counseling** from admired, deeply-caring role models who are committed to these young adults and who also firmly challenge self-defeating attitudes from a basis of love
- **positive peer support with a clear value system** strong enough to compete with the streets
- **a mini-community that offers a sense of belonging** and a foundation young people can believe in—with everyone committed to everyone else's success
- **a role in governance** and the ability to participate in important decisions about staff and policies in their own programs
- **leadership development and civic education** offering a vision of the important role young adults can play in their neighborhoods and society to change conditions that have harmed them and the people they love—and the skills to do so
- **assistance in managing money and building assets** such as individual development accounts, scholarships, financial literacy training, and budgeting
- **placements with colleges and employers**
- **support after graduation** with continued counseling and the opportunity to belong to a supportive community.

This is the YouthBuild model. If caring, competent adults offer those elements in an environment of profound respect for the intelligence and value of the young people, you will see dramatic changes. Young people will define new goals for their lives and will gain the skills and confidence to take real steps toward achieving their goals.

**The Voice and Experience of Disconnected Youth, One Story Representing Hundreds of Thousands**:

Listen to what Mike Dean has to say:

When he was just 11 years old in Columbus, Ohio, Mike cut hair to put food on the table for his four younger siblings—often just Ramen noodles. Their mom was hooked on drugs and alcohol and was gone frequently for a day or two at a time. Mike had to get his sisters and brothers ready for school. He often was embarrassed at school because roaches would crawl out of his clothes or notebooks. An average student, he lettered in basketball, a sport that kept him in high school.

At age 16, he fled his home life and spent the next few years crashing at different friends' homes. He often skipped school for weeks at a time. He wasn't a gangster or a bad kid—just one without direction. At age 17, he got his 15-year-old girlfriend pregnant. When the basketball coach found out Mike was a runaway, he was cut from the team. Behind academically, Mike dropped out of school completely and hung out with the wrong crowd, drinking and getting high. He tried working at McDonalds but saw how much his drug dealer friends were earning so he joined their ranks. He was arrested and went to the workhouse for a few weeks. But when he got out, he returned to his old ways again.

Mike's girlfriend saw an ad for YouthBuild, and they both applied. In YouthBuild, Mike suddenly found people who showed him genuine love, a new experience for him. "Eventually, YouthBuild became my family, and I let a lot of my old friends go," he says. "These people really gave me a chance, despite all that had transpired. There were people who actually showed they cared."

Today, Mike is 30. He earned his GED through YouthBuild. He earned more than $10 an hour at union construction jobs. Today, he is a program manager/construction manager at YouthBuild, helping other young people who were once like him. He is vice president of the national YouthBuild alumni council. He's starting his own construction business.

He married his girlfriend, and they have three children with a fourth on the way. He owns his own home. He is an ordained minister and vice president of a nonprofit

that mentors young men. He would like to start his own nonprofit to help juveniles successfully return to their neighborhoods after they have been in juvenile detention facilities. He wants to create the nonprofit to honor the memory of his younger brother who was shot to death after he left a juvenile detention facility.

In your own states, your own communities, you have young men—and women—who were just like Mike Dean. Adrift. Floundering. Heading downhill fast. You can play a major role in determining whether they turn their lives around.

**In Closing**:

Let me just say again: We know what works. We simply need the resources to expand so we can engage tens of thousands more young people in programs such as YouthBuild. All the programs with waiting lists should be supported to open their doors to all the youth who are knocking. They are leaving the public schools and lining up outside the doors of programs that offer them a sense of belonging to a caring community, skills for jobs and college, and clear pathways to a hope-filled and meaningful future.

I am convinced that if we do this, we can solve one of America's most pressing domestic policy challenges. In fact, if we build up a head of steam so that young people all across the country see the doors opening for their friends and former street buddies, I believe they would all want to follow their friends, creating a great movement in the right direction. We have seen this often: for example, after Trevor Daniels joined Youth Action YouthBuild in East Harlem, and found a pathway to college, the next year **sixteen of his friends from his housing project followed right behind him**, and joined YouthBuild, with new hope in their hearts.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to submit this statement to this subcommittee.

Dorothy Stoneman
*Chairperson of the National YouthBuild Coalition*