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Runaway and Homeless Youth: Legislative Issues

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Summary

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHYP) funds basic centers and transitional living projects. Funding for FY1998 remains at the FY1997 level (\$58.6 million). The reauthorization of RHYP is traditionally part of the reauthorization of the juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs — this year the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act of 1997 (S. 10) in the Senate and the Juvenile Crime Control and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1997 (H.R. 1818) in the House. The House has passed H.R. 1818, and the Senate Committee on the Judiciary has reported S. 10.

Demographics of Runaway and Homeless Youth¹

Runaways. About 15% of youth who responded to a household survey reported that they had had a runaway experience — suggesting that an estimated 2.8 million youth aged 12-17 had runaway at least once. Those reporting a runaway experience were primarily white (63%) and evenly split between males and females. While those who reported a runaway experience were not especially more likely to live in poor households, the runaways were somewhat more likely than non-runaways to report that they did not live with both parents. Those reporting a runaway experience were much more likely than non-runaways to report sexual activity, drug use, physical fights, and carrying a weapon.

Street Youth. About 56% of youth aged 12-21 who lived on the streets or in public places reported that they had never used a youth shelter. They were more likely to report that the shelters were dangerous, dirty, exclusionary, and oriented too much toward

¹A total of 6,496 youth aged 12-17 were asked a series of questions about runaway experiences as part of the nationwide household survey of Youth Risk Behavior during 1992-1993. Researchers also sampled 600 street youth in 10 urban areas during 1992-1993. The street sample did not yield nationally representative data because of the methodological limitations of surveying this type of population. Greene, Jody M. et al. *Youth with Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Experiences: Prevalence, Drug Use, and Other At-Risk Behaviors*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by the Research Triangle Institute. February 1995.

religion. Nonetheless, 61% said that they thought youth shelters could help youth like themselves figure out what to do with their lives. Thirty percent of these youth reported they had been robbed, 29% had been assaulted, 14% had been sexually victimized, and 21% had traded sex for food, shelter or drugs. Notably, 81% of these youth reported they had committed a theft, 42% had committed assault, and 50% had been involved in distributing drugs.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Program

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHYP), located in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children and Families, has since 1974 funded basic centers, i.e., local facilities providing emergency residential care and counseling for runaway and homeless youth as well as after care counseling for the family. The goal is to reunite youth with their families. In addition, the program funds a national toll-free hotline. The law, designed to meet the needs of runaway and homeless youth outside of the law enforcement and juvenile justice system, does not specify any income eligibility requirements. The basic center grants are made directly to the shelters, but dollar amounts are allocated according to each state's percent of the population age 18 or younger.

In FY1989, RHYP also began offering grants for transitional living projects and drug abuse education and prevention projects. Authority for home-based and street-based services and for rural basic center demonstrations were added in 1992. In FY1995, Congress appropriated \$40.5 million for RHYP basic center grants, \$13.7 million for transitional living, and \$14.5 million for drug abuse education and prevention which, in turn, funded 354 basic center grantees, 72 transitional living grantees, and 127 drug abuse education and prevention grantees that year. Many of the transitional living and drug education and prevention grants went to the recipients of basic center grants. FY1995 was the last year the drug education and prevention projects were funded. Currently (FY1998), Congress has appropriated \$43.6 million for RHYP basic center grants and \$14.9 million for transitional living projects.

RHYP reportedly served 116,192 youth from January 1991 to August 1995. About one-third of these clients were actually runaways, throwaways, or homeless youth. About 58% were youth who were considered to be at risk of becoming runaways, throwaways, or homeless youth, and the remaining 10% were not identified. Most clients — 60% — were non-Hispanic white, while 22% were non-Hispanic Black, 12% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 3% American Indian. The average age was 15 years, with 9% being 12 years or younger. Only 9% of the clients were walk-ins. Most came to RHYP centers through referrals by entities such as the police or juvenile justice (29%), schools or child welfare (25%), youth service agencies (16%) and parents or legal guardians (14%).²

²These data come from a presentation made by Caliber Associates, February 5, 1996, and from *Analysis and Interpretation of New Information concerning Runaway and Homeless Youth: General Profile*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by Caliber Associates. January 29, 1996.

Current Legislation

The Clinton Administration, as the Bush Administration before it, proposes to consolidate the various components of RHYP (only two of which are currently funded) into a single grant program to streamline the management of the program at all levels. The Clinton Administration proposal would keep funding at the same level as the two programs combined (\$58.6 million), but would require that at least 20% of the funds be used for transitional living projects. Congress rejected program consolidation when it reauthorized the programs in 1992, but may be more receptive this year. The primary concern about consolidation in past years was that emergency shelter services (i.e., basic centers) would absorb all the monies and that the transitional living projects for older homeless youth would lose funding. The proposal to reserve monies for transitional living projects may assuage those concerns.

Legislation to reauthorize RHYP was introduced in the 104th Congress as part of the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) programs, but was not enacted. Although RHYP traditionally has not been especially controversial, its reauthorization does become embroiled in a range of juvenile justice controversies because it is included in the reauthorization of JJDP. Efforts to reauthorize JJDP raise, among other things, contentious policy questions on the treatment of juveniles in the federal judicial system and when violent youthful offenders should be prosecuted and sentenced as adults. Authority for RHYP expired on September 30, 1996.³

Once again, legislation to reauthorize RHYP has been introduced as part of the JJDP reauthorization — the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act of 1997 (S. 10) in the Senate and the Juvenile Crime Control and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1997 (H.R. 1818) in the House. The Senate Committee on the Judiciary reported S. 10 (S.Rept. 105-108) on October 9, 1997, but no further action was taken before the first session adjournment. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce reported H.R. 1818 (H.Rept. 105-155), and it passed the House on July 15, 1997.

The House bill, H.R. 1818, would reauthorize RHYP through FY2001 and would make several programmatic changes. Most significantly, H.R. 1818 would fold the transitional living program into a single funding stream with the basic center grants. It also eliminates specific provisions for street-based and home-based services and includes these services as allowable activities under the single funding stream. The bill additionally allows for — but does not require — a consolidated review of grant applications. However, H.R. 1818 clearly would retain separate funding for the transitional living program, specifying that between 20% and 30% of funds appropriated for the basic center grants must be reserved for the transitional living program.

As reported, S. 10 would reauthorize RHYP with “such sums as may be necessary” through FY2002 and does not make any substantive changes to the RHYP program. The bill as reported would reauthorize RHYP for 5 years with “such sums as may be

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(42 U.S.C. 5701 *et seq.*), including basic center grants and the transitional living grant program, as part of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-586).

necessary” through FY2002 and would retain separate funding streams for the various RHYP programs.

In terms of FY1998 appropriations, Congress passed FY1998 funding legislation (H.R. 2264) that funds RHYP at the FY1997 level (\$58.6 million). The President signed the measure into law (P.L. 105-78) on November 13, 1997. RHYP basic center grants is funded at \$43.6 million, and the transitional living program is funded at \$14.9 million, the same amounts as FY1997.