



The Runaway and Homeless Youth & Trafficking Prevention Act (RHYTPA) provides support to youth experiencing homelessness throughout the country. First passed in 1974, and reauthorized many times since, grants funded by RHYTPA have been allocated in order to assist vulnerable populations of youth. The current economic crisis and related stress have heightened the potential for increases in youth and young family homelessness. Youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to fall victim to sex trafficking. According to a 2016 report from the Family & Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), 24% of youth living on the streets exchanged sex for money, and 27.5% did so for a place to stay. Providing housing, basic life needs, and services prevents our young people from being exploited and/or trafficked for sex and/or labor.

The programs outlined by this act are carried out by the Family and Youth Services Bureau in the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.¹ RHYTPA funds three key pillars to serve youth experiencing homelessness and then some:²

- **Street Outreach Programs:** provide education, treatment, counseling, connection, and referrals to vital services.
- **Basic Center Programs:** provide temporary housing with counseling, therapeutic family intervention, and reunification services.
- **Transitional Living Programs/Maternity Group Homes:** provide longer-term housing with supportive services, including Maternity Group Homes for pregnant and parenting youth.
- **National Communications System:** 24/7 national phone and online communications system which connects youth and families in crisis with prevention services and reunifies families through a messaging service
- **National Technical Assistance Center:** provide training and technical assistance to all RHYA funded grantees through in-person and online training, one-on-one consultation and various materials.

Youth Specific Homelessness Statistics

- Of youth experiencing homelessness, **1 in 5** has been a victim of sex or labor trafficking, or both.
- **73%** experienced an episode of homelessness **lasting more than a month**
- Regardless of the how they experienced homelessness, **52% of youth felt unsafe.**
- **72%** of those who slept on the streets or in shelters, also couch-surfed
- Nearly **25%** of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness had precursors in the context of family homelessness
- The City of Seattle found **43%** of their unsheltered homeless population **first experienced homelessness as a minor (18%) or as a young adult between 18 and 24 (25%).**

Vulnerabilities of Runaway Youth:

¹ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33785/55>

² <https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/NN4Y-RHYA-McK-fact-sheet.pdf>



Youth may run away from home due to a variety of factors including familial struggles, abuse or neglect, and problems in school such as bullying.³ A running theme tends to be feeling out-of-control of one's own life and a need to escape. Research has shown that youth who have run away face a higher risk of victimization, commercial sexual exploitation, and labor trafficking. These vulnerabilities are heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic due to increased family conflicts, as well as further disconnection from schools and other supportive services. Strong legislative action is needed to ensure that these youth receive the services they need to secure safe environments and avoid further trauma.

Why Reauthorization is Needed:

According to Covenant House,⁴

- 57% of homeless youth go without food at least one day per month
- Approximately 50% of youth who age out of the foster care or juvenile justice system will experience homelessness within six months of independent living
- An estimated 20,000 children in America are forced into sexual exploitation by human trafficking networks each year
- Almost 40% of individuals experiencing homelessness in the United States are under the age of 18

Reintroduction in the 117th Congress will enact critical changes that will increase young people's ability to access pathways to independence, socioeconomic mobility, and success. RHYTPA will help to achieve these goals by making key updates to the existing program, such as:

- Extending the allowable length of stays in Basic Center Programs from 21 to 30 days (or longer as state law allows) and increasing the number of allowable beds to 20
- Programs and services will also ensure staff training on human trafficking, trauma, sexual abuse, and assault
- Basic Center Programs are to engage in outreach with victims of sexual abuse, exploitation, trafficking in persons, or sex trafficking
- Transitional Living Programs will extend services to victims of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking in persons, or sex trafficking as practicable.
- Increasing age eligibility for services up to the age of 25 in Transitional Living Programs
- Comprehensive nondiscriminatory practices across all RHYTPA funded programs
- Ensuring Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion assistance
- Increases authorized appropriations levels to \$300 million annually

Previous Sponsors & Supporters from the 116th Congress:

Senator Patrick Leahy [D-VT], Senator Susan Collins [R-ME], Sen. Cory Booker [D-NJ], and Sen. Kelly Ayotte [R-NH]

³ <https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/blog/2020/07/overlap-human-trafficking-and-runaway-and-homeless-youth>

⁴ <https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-teen-issues/statistics>



Learn More:

- Visit <https://sharedhope.org/what-we-do/bring-justice/> to access Shared Hope's research and advocacy resources.
- For technical assistance, visit: <https://sharedhope.org/legislative-technical-assistance/>