



FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

April 23, 2015

The Honorable Dave Reichert
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Yarmuth
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Reichert and Representative Yarmuth,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), a bipartisan organization advocating for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (H.R. 1770).

As an organization committed to protecting the well-being of homeless children and youth, we support legislation that will provide homeless children and youth, as well as children at-risk of being trafficked, with a variety of services that can mitigate harm and improve outcomes for this vulnerable population.

Over 1 million youth experience one night of homelessness a year with 550,000 youth being homeless for a week or longer. Homeless children and youth are particularly vulnerable to the threat of human trafficking, and those children with a history of abuse are even more at-risk of exploitation.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Act would strengthen assistance to runaway and homeless youth by updating provisions for three key grant programs that help to serve homeless children and their families to include protections for children and youth who are victims of human trafficking. The bill also includes a key non-discrimination clause to ensure children and youth will not be denied services based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Basic Center Programs offer short-term housing as well as a variety of wraparound services that help at-risk youth avoid the threat of human traffickers while Transitional Living Programs provide longer-term housing supports and programming that aims to improve health, education, and work outcomes for homeless youth. Street Outreach Programs refer homeless children and youth who are victims of sexual exploitation or abuse to services that address trauma and help move this population off the street and away from their abusers.

H.R. 1770 also addresses the lack of data on homeless and exploited children and youth by implementing new research and data collection programs. This new research will help service providers scale up existing programs and begin to tackle the problem of youth homelessness and human trafficking.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act maintains strong bipartisan support in both chambers. Just this week, Senator Leahy introduced the RHYTPA as an amendment to the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (S. 178). The amendment failed to reach the 60-vote threshold by only 4 votes, portraying a clear foundation for future bipartisan work on the bill.

The programs authorized through The Runaway Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act are not only the right thing to do, they are also highly cost-effective in comparison to the alternative paths to chronic homelessness and the criminal justice system that many of these children and youth face.

We welcome the opportunity to continue working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley