

# FACT SHEET: CALIFORNIA RUNAWAY & HOMELESS YOUTH ACT

## SENATOR CAROL LIU

### BACKGROUND

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Despite the fact that more than 200,000 unaccompanied children (age 12 to 17) experience homelessness each year in California, the State has no clear and coordinated policy to reduce youth homelessness.

Research has shown that homeless youth and young adults are at great risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, chemical or alcohol dependency, and death.

The cost of youth homelessness to the state of California is also considerable. Youth and young adults who experience homelessness are disproportionately likely to be arrested and incarcerated as adults, costing California taxpayers over \$50,000 per inmate annually.

Worsening matters is the current economic recession, which has expanded youth homelessness by limiting employment opportunities for youth. As of July 2010, unemployment among transition-age youth reached 49%, the highest level since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting data in 1948.

While the California Emergency Management Agency is the state agency that administers programming related to youth homelessness, it does so without a strong mandate or clear vision as to how its activities and funding will significantly impact youth homelessness in California. It is also limited by a budget of less than \$500,000 per year to serve all of California's homeless youth.

To address this serious issue, the state of California must make an explicit commitment to ending youth homeless. It must ascertain the extent of the problem, our capacity to solve it, the cost of ending youth homelessness, and potential sources of necessary revenue.

### SOLUTION

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The California Runaway and Homeless Youth Act will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive solution to youth homelessness. It will:

- Declare homeless youth a priority, special needs population deserving of state policy attention and intervention;
- Clearly define youth homelessness, and determine the population of homeless youth;
- Determine the statewide demand for shelter, housing, and supportive services;
- Identify data and outcome measures from which to evaluate public investment in homeless youth services;
- Propose a consistent State revenue stream from state government, to meet demand for shelter, housing, and services;
- Specify the role of the child welfare system in preventing and addressing homelessness for minors experiencing abuse and neglect;
- Specify the role of law enforcement in responding to runaway youth;
- Name the California Emergency Management Agency as the responsible state agency which will administratively interpret and lead efforts under the Act; and
- Ensure an open planning process that engages stakeholders statewide, including homeless youth, parents, homeless youth providers, advocates, researchers and representatives of relevant State agencies.

### SPONSOR/SUPPORT

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*Co-Sponsors:* John Burton Foundation, California Coalition for Youth