

# FACT SHEET: REGULATING EMERGENCY YOUTH SHELTERS

## BACKGROUND

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More than 200,000 unaccompanied minors (age 12 to 17) and thousands more young adults (age 18 to 24) experience homelessness each year in California, and have few programs they can access for basic needs such as shelter, food or clothing. These programs, referred to as emergency youth shelters, provide voluntary and temporary shelter to minors to ensure their safety and well-being. For youth who have recently left their homes, the goal is usually family reunification. For others, it is keeping them in the shelter and off the streets, while developing a plan for their long-term stability. Emergency youth shelter programs not only provide basic necessities, but also provide counseling, case management, consistency, and support, with a focus on safety, stability, and trust-building. These shelters are designed to serve youth who have been missed by other systems (foster care, juvenile justice and mental health). Youth shelters are fiscally efficient programs that maximize dollars by serving youth with blended funding.

In California, approximately 40 emergency youth shelters are funded by the federal government through funds appropriated in the Runaway & Homeless Youth Act, through the Department of Health and Human Services' Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB). One requirement of this funding is that a program complies with state and/or local licensing requirements. In California, the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services, licenses and monitors children's residential group homes, but not explicitly youth emergency shelters. More specifically, the Title 22 California Code of Regulations is designed to regulate (non-voluntary) long-term, out-of-home placements for youth in protective custody (foster care, etc.).

Emergency youth shelters however, are designed to provide voluntary and temporary shelter to youth

who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; they are not long-term placements. Despite the framework of regulations being designed for group homes, in order to comply with state and local licensing requirements, providers who receive federal funding for their shelters must apply for licensure with their local CCLD. There has been inconsistent implementation of the standards throughout the state. In some counties, CCLD automatically waives emergency shelters from the group home license. Other counties require shelters to adopt the regulations by modifying their programs and/or offer exemptions to specific components of the license.

In communities where emergency youth shelter programs have been required to adopt group home standards, there have been unintended consequences of creating greater barriers for unaccompanied minors to entry into emergency shelters (such as the requirement of parental notification, 24-hour supervision, separation of siblings of opposite sex and of varying ages, etc.).

## SOLUTION

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Ultimately, current CCLD regulations are not appropriate for emergency youth shelter programs, and do not raise the programs' level of care. In addition, California's emergency youth shelter programs could eventually lose potential federal funding if they are not licensed or regulated. Therefore, in an effort to conform to federal standards and ensure their ability to obtain future funding, we recommend developing an alternative category of regulations designed specifically for emergency youth shelters.

## SUPPORT

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*Support:* John Burton Foundation, California Coalition for Youth