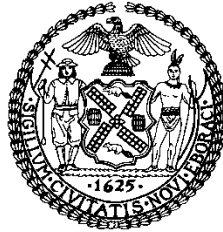


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April 25, 2014

Oversight: Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth

INTRODUCTION

On April 25, 2014, the Committee on Youth Services, chaired by Council Member Mathieu Eugene, and the Committee on General Welfare, chaired by Council Member Stephen Levin, will conduct a joint hearing entitled “Oversight: Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth.” Representatives from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), as well as advocates, and other concerned members of the community have been invited to testify.

BACKGROUND

The first step toward providing services for vulnerable populations is to determine the size of such populations. However, determining the size of two of New York City’s most vulnerable populations, runaway and homeless youth and sexually exploited youth, has proven to be very difficult.

Although there are estimates, there is no conclusive number of unsheltered homeless youth in New York City on any given night. A 2007 study conducted by the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, in coordination with service providers, the New School, and Columbia University, estimated that there are approximately 3,800 unaccompanied homeless youth¹ in the City.² The study further concluded that there is an estimated 1,750 street-homeless youth per night sleeping outside, in abandoned buildings, at transportation sites or in cars, buses,

¹ For purposes of the study, the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services refers to “unaccompanied homeless youth” to mean homeless youth and young adults who are not living with parents or guardians and does not include homeless youth who are not the head of household in family shelters, or the children of street homeless or marginally housed families. The 3,800 number also did not include youth in the DHS, HRA, or HPD sheltering systems. Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, “Counting Youth Matters – And NYC Can do Better! Briefing Report on the 2013 Point-in-Time Count of Street Homeless Youth and Recommendations for 2014,” fn. 1 available at <http://www.empirestatecoalition.org/main/pdf/2013%20NYC%20Youth%20Count%20Briefing%20Report%20Response-%20Counting%20Homeless%20Youth%20Matters.pdf> (Hereinafter *Counting Youth Matters*).

² The estimated 3,800 homeless youth did not count the youth in the Department of Homeless Services, Human Resources Administration, or Housing Preservation and Development shelter systems. *Id.* at 5.

trains or other vehicles, or engaged in survival sex for a place to sleep.³ The survey found that only 48 percent of those surveyed had used services in the DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) continuum, and only 6 percent had spent nights in the preceding month staying in the adult sheltering system.⁴

As for sexually exploited youth, many of whom are also homeless, a 2001 study found that the number of children at risk of sexual exploitation nationwide is between 200,000 and 300,000.⁵ Other estimates put this number somewhere between 100,000 and 3 million.⁶ There have been two New York City-based studies on sexually exploited youth. In 2007, a report was prepared by Westat, a research corporation, for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), titled, “New York Prevalence Study of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children” (OCFS Report).⁷ The OCFS Report asked agencies in New York City that were likely to interact with commercially exploited youth to report on the number of such youth.⁸ Based on that data, the OCFS Report estimated that there were 2,253 commercially sexually exploited children in New York City.⁹ In 2008, the Center for Court Innovation and John Jay College of Criminal Justice authored “The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City,” (CSEC Study) which was submitted to the National Institute of Justice, United States Department of Justice. The CSEC Study gathered data by interviewing a small number of sexually exploited youth who were referred by social services agencies, and then paying those youth to recruit other commercially exploited youth to the study. In total, 329 commercially

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Ecpat-USA, Inc., *Who Is There to Help Us: How the System Fails Sexually Exploited Girls in the United States* 2 (2005), <http://ecpatusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Who-Is-There-to-Help-Us.3.pdf> (last visited Feb. 12, 2013) (Hereinafter *Who Is There*).

⁶ Gragg, F. et al, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, *New York Prevalence Study of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children* 3 (2007) <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/Reports/CSEC-2007.pdf>. (last visited Feb. 12, 2013) (hereinafter *OCFS Report*).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* at 89.

⁹ *Id.* at 23.

sexually exploited youth were interviewed, and researchers estimated that there were 3,946 commercially sexually exploited youth in New York City.¹⁰ However, both of these studies were limited to certain periods of time, and no mechanism existed to obtain an updated number on an ongoing basis. Additionally, it is difficult to determine an exact number of sexually exploited youth, likely because of the underground nature of the sex market and the stigma associated with sex work.¹¹

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the number of RHY and sexually exploited youth in New York City, ACS, DYCD, and DHS have recently completed two separate research projects: The Hope Count and The Local Law 23 Annual Report. DYCD, DHS, and ACS were chosen for these reporting requirements because they are the three city agencies most likely to come into contact with runaway and homeless youth and sexually exploited youth.

DYCD is responsible for providing services and shelter for runaway and homeless youth.¹² DYCD's RHY continuum includes street outreach services, drop-in centers, crisis shelters, and transitional independent living (TIL) programs.¹³ For homeless youth in the City seeking shelter, there are only 247 certified residential beds for runaway and homeless youth, although that number is expected to increase in 2014.¹⁴ These 247 beds include both crisis shelters and TIL facilities. Crisis shelters are the entry-point for the DYCD's RHY system and offer emergency shelter for runaway and homeless youth up to the age of 21.¹⁵ Crisis shelters are short-term residential programs that provide emergency shelter and crisis intervention services aimed at reuniting youth with their families or, if family reunification is not possible, arranging

¹⁰ CSEC Report, *supra* note 1 at 33.

¹¹ CSEC Report, *supra* note 1 at 1-2.

¹² New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Youth and Community Development, *Local Law 23 of 2013 Annual Report 2* (2014).

¹³ *Id.* at 3-4.

¹⁴ Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, Department of Youth and Community Development, (Feb. 2014), p.124.

¹⁵ NYC Department of Youth & Community Development, Runaway Homeless Youth, Crisis Shelters.

appropriate transitional and long-term placements.¹⁶ After visiting a crisis shelter, a young person may receive a referral to a transitional TIL facility which provides support and shelter to homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 21.¹⁷ Youth may stay in a TIL facility for 18 months.¹⁸ TIL facilities offer educational programs, vocational training, job placement assistance, counseling, and basic life skills training. In Fiscal Year 2013, crisis shelters served 1,478 youth and TIL facilities served 332 youth.¹⁹

When a young person ages or times out of a DYCD RHY crisis shelter or a TIL facility, and has not secured permanent housing, or was unable to secure a space in a crisis shelter, the individual, if he or she is at least 18 years old, may enter the DHS shelter system. If the young person is pregnant or a custodial parent, he or she will enter the DHS shelter system as a family with children²⁰ and must go to the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) center in the Bronx for intake and an eligibility determination. Those entering as a single individual must go to one of the three intake centers for single adults.²¹

Meanwhile, ACS is responsible for overseeing New York City's child welfare system, as well as, its juvenile detention facilities. As such a large number of sexually exploited youth have been involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, ACS is in a prime position to identify sexually exploited youth, or those at risk of sexual exploitation, to prevent it from happening and to assist those who are victimized.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ NYC Department of Youth & Community Development, Runaway Homeless Youth, Transitional Independent Living.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, Department of Youth and Community Development, (Feb. 2014), p.124.

²⁰ For young people in the DYCD RHY system, Covenant House has a program specifically for pregnant young people and young people with children. For DHS' purposes, families with children include individuals or families with a minor child under 21, a pregnant woman, or a family with a pregnant woman.

²¹ All single adult men go to the 30th Street intake facility in Manhattan. There is one intake center in Brooklyn and one in the Bronx for single adult women.

ANNUAL HOPE COUNT AND YOUTH COUNT

Since 2005,²² DHS has undertaken an annual point-in-time survey of the number of individuals living in New York City's public spaces.²³ The Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) count is conducted overnight each January by thousands of volunteers.²⁴ Although cities wishing to draw down funding from the McKinney-Vento Act²⁵ must conduct biennial surveys of the street homeless population, the City began conducting the survey prior to this requirement.²⁶ In 2013, the survey concluded that there were a total of 3,180 unsheltered individuals, with 1,339 street homeless individual in "surface areas" and 1,841 individuals in the subways.²⁷ This represents an overall 28 percent decrease in street homeless individuals since 2008, with a 62 percent decrease in individuals in "surface areas," but a 118 percent increase in individuals on the subways.²⁸ Out of the estimated 3,180 unsheltered individuals in 2013, only 128 were categorized as unsheltered homeless youth.²⁹

In 2013, for the first time, the United States (U.S.) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) worked with nine cities, including New York City, to conduct a count of street homeless youth and young adults.³⁰ DHS, DYCD, and the New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care (NYC CCoC) collaborated in order to count the unsheltered youth and young adult population in

²² The HOPE count began in 2003 in Manhattan only, and was expanded to the entire City in 2005.

²³ NYC Department of Homeless Services, HOPE 2014, The NYC Street Survey, The HOPE Overview *available at* <https://a071-hope.nyc.gov/hope/overview.aspx> (last visited April 15, 2014).

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (PL100-77) provides federal funding for a range of local services to homeless people, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary healthcare, education, and some permanent housing.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ NYC Department of Homeless Services, HOPE 2014, The NYC Street Survey, HOPE Statistics, *available at* <https://a071-hope.nyc.gov/hope/statistics.aspx> (last visited April 15, 2014).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Testimony of Deborah Harper, Assistant Commissioner of Runaway and Homeless Youth, Department of Youth and Community Development, before the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services, Executive Budget Hearing (May 2013), p. 145.

³⁰ *Counting Youth Matters*, *supra* note 1; Bolas, James, "City Must Show That Street Homeless Youth Count," CITY LIMITS, (July 25, 2013).

conjunction with the HOPE count.³¹ In total there were 1,420 youth identified the night of the count, including youth involved in DHS and DYCD facilities, drop-in centers, and on the street. According to DYCD, 710 of the youth were in the DHS adult shelter system, 253 in the DYCD RHY system, and 128 were on the street.³²

On the night of the count, an additional 182 youth came into the 14 drop-in centers which were left open overnight, and five supportive housing residences. The NYC CCoC developed a survey that was provided to the 182 youth and young adults that came to the drop-in centers and supportive housing.³³ Of the 182 youth, 73 percent (132 out of 182 respondents) met the HUD definition of homelessness.³⁴ The survey found that the majority of the youth were black and Hispanic/Latino (41.82 and 47.73 percent respectively), and 61.36 percent were male and 31.06 percent were female.³⁵ Although a slight majority identified their sexual orientation as “straight” (55 percent), 35 percent identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.³⁶ Six percent identified as transgendered, while 13.64 refused to respond, did not know, or this information was missing.³⁷ The average length of stay for the youth surveyed was 927 days, and the most common place where respondents stayed the previous night was with a friend (25 percent).³⁸ Other places where respondents had stayed the previous night included the subway (12.88 percent), a relative’s home (12.12 percent), outside (9.85 percent), a youth shelter (9.85 percent), shelter (6.06 percent), with a boyfriend or girlfriend (5.3 percent), and in an abandoned/foreclosed building (4.55 percent),

³¹ *Counting Youth Matters*, *supra* note 1.

³² *Supra* note 29.

³³ Pregamit, Michael, Cunningham, Mary, Burt, Martha, Lee, Pamela, Howell, Brent, Bertumen, Kassie, “Youth Count! Process Study,” URBAN INSTITUTE, (2013) available at <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412872-youth-count-process-study-2.pdf>.

³⁴ Freeman, Lance, Hamilton, Darrick, “A Count of Unaccompanied Homeless Youths in New York City,” New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care,” (Nov. 19, 2013) available at http://www.nychomeless.com/downloads/pdf/2013_NYC_Homeless_Youth_Report.pdf.

³⁵ *Id.* at 8.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.* at 10, 16.

among other answers.³⁹ Almost half of respondents, 47.33 percent, reported staying at the previous locations for less than five days.⁴⁰ The report on the survey notes that the data cannot be generalized to the larger homeless youth population.⁴¹

The methodology used to collect the data from 2013 raised some concerns, particularly about the significant undercounting of unsheltered homeless youth. With previous estimates of the number of unaccompanied homeless youth and young people in the City as high as 3,800, advocates have asserted that the City's estimate was unrepresentative of the actual number of homeless youth. Advocates criticized the agencies for not consulting youth in designing the count, and did not add locations where homeless youth typically congregate into the HOPE count. The count did not take into account youth who "break night" (stay awake), couch surf, trade sex or labor for a place to stay, slept in hallways or roof tops of friends and relatives, stayed in abandoned buildings, or were homeless prior to entry in jails, emergency rooms, or hospital beds.⁴² Additionally, because the 182 youth who showed up at drop-in centers and housing were counted as being sheltered, they were not included in the official HOPE count of unsheltered individuals which was reported to the federal government.⁴³

The most recent HOPE count and related unsheltered youth count was conducted on the night of January 27, 2014 and into the morning hours of January 28th. The 2014 data is not yet available.

³⁹ The remaining answers included: family home (3.03 percent); place of business not intended for overnight sleep (3.03 percent); church bed/church (1.52 percent); with a sex work or prostitution client (1.52 percent); juvenile detention center/jail (0.76 percent); other shelter (0.76 percent); and permanent supportive housing (0.76 percent). *Id.* at 16.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.* at 29.

⁴² *Counting Youth Matters*, *supra* note 1.

⁴³ *Id.* at 4.

LOCAL LAW 23

In 2013, the Council passed and the Mayor signed into law, Local Law 23. Local Law 23 requires DYCD and ACS to provide a yearly report to the Council on the number of sexually exploited children in contact with DYCD's runaway and homeless youth services or ACS, disaggregated by age, gender, and by whether the child had contact with DYCD, ACS, or both. The agencies also have to report their methods for collecting such information. In addition, DYCD and ACS are required to describe the services which they provide to meet the needs of sexually exploited children, including the number of beds designated for such children and the types of health and mental health services provided.

In 2014, DYCD and ACS submitted the first annual report under Local Law 23 (the report) to the Council.⁴⁴ As required by the law, the report outlines the number of sexually exploited children in contact with ACS and DYCD and the services available such children. In addition, the report outlines some of the issues involved in gathering such information.

The report states that one major challenge in providing services for sexually exploited children is in identifying such children.⁴⁵ Children generally come into contact with ACS because they have experienced issues such as abuse, neglect, truancy, juvenile justice/PINS matters, substance misuse, mental health concerns and domestic violence.⁴⁶ These young people are often either ashamed to admit to being the victim of sexual exploitation or do not identify themselves as victims.⁴⁷ Providers have found that young people are often reluctant to disclose

⁴⁴ New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Youth and Community Development, *Local Law 23 of 2013 Annual Report* (2014).

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 13.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

sexual exploitation at an intake session, and may not discuss it until they have developed a rapport with staff members.⁴⁸

Having recognized such difficulties, and having received a small influx of Safe Harbor funds, ACS and DYCD have worked to develop new ways of investigating and identifying cases of sexual exploitation. The report states that in 2006 ACS began using a team of investigative consultants, all of whom have specialized law enforcement expertise, to investigate all cases involving suspected sexual exploitation.⁴⁹ In addition, in 2012, ACS published a policy guide and began providing training staff on how to identify, engage and support victims of sexual exploitation.⁵⁰ With the influx of Safe Harbor funding, ACS was able to provide a sexually exploited youth counselor at the Children's Center and weekly sexual exploitation educational group at the Children's Center and two ACS-run juvenile detention facilities.⁵¹

The report also includes a list of services available to sexually exploited youth through ACS and DYCD and a description of such services. ACS has worked with several non-profit organizations to provide a continuum of service options to sexually exploited youth, including residential and family foster care programs operated by Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) that are tailored specifically to this population.⁵² JCCA's residential program, Gateways, is an intensive, specialized residential and treatment program for girls ages 12 to 16 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation.⁵³ ACS currently contracts with JCCA for 12 Gateways foster beds, and since 2011 48 girls have been served through the Gateways program.⁵⁴ JCCA also contracts with ACS to provide a residential program for sexually exploited

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 5.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 5-6.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 8-9.

⁵² *Id.* at 6.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

young women who are in the juvenile justice non-secure placement system.⁵⁵ The program can accommodate 6 girls and since September 2012 it has served 15 girls.⁵⁶ ACS also partners with preventive programs that are specifically targeted to preventing foster care placements of sexually exploited youth.⁵⁷ The New Beginnings program at St. Luke's – Roosevelt Hospital Center/Community Services for Children & Families is an intensive clinical program for families with a youth ages 12 to 17 who has been sexually exploited and commercially trafficked.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, DYCD has several programs for sexually exploited youth within their continuum of RHY services. DYCD contracts with one provider, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) to provide 8 city-funded TIL beds for sexually exploited young women.⁵⁹ However, there are currently no specialized residential services for young men or transgender youth.⁶⁰ DYCD also used Safe Harbor funds to expand its contract with Safe Horizon, which runs the street outreach program.⁶¹ These funds allowed Safe Horizon to purchase a third van to provide street outreach which is targeted at connecting with youth at-risk of sexual exploitation who have left their ACS foster care placements.⁶²

Finally, the appendix of the report provides numbers for youth in contact with ACS or DYCD's RHY continuum who have been victims of sexual exploitation. In 2013, DYCD identified 102 young people, 15 males and 87 females who had contact with DYCD and who had been victims of sexual exploitation.⁶³ Of those 102 youth, 19 had had previous contact with ACS, 43 received a mental health referral, and 38 received mental health counseling. An

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 4.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.* at 9.

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Youth and Community Development, *Local Law 23 of 2013 Annual Report Appendix 2* (2014).

additional 36 sexually exploited young people were referred to DYCD's Summer Youth Employment Program from ACS.⁶⁴ The appendix also breaks down the number of youth in several ACS programs who have been victims of sexual exploitation. In 2013, the Gateways program served 31 sexually exploited youth while the JCCA non-secure placement residence served 10. The Mt. Sinai- St. Luke's Roosevelt New Beginnings Program provided service for 94 unique cases in which at least one child within the family being served was considered sexually exploited or at risk for sexual exploitation.⁶⁵ The Ali Forney Center, which provides services for at-risk and homeless LGBTQ youth served 62 young people through their internship or psycho-education group who experienced or who were at-risk for sexual exploitation.⁶⁶ In addition, the Ali Forney Center provided services to 18 new intakes who reported being victims of sexual exploitation.⁶⁷ The Hetrick-Martin Institute, which also provides services for LGBTQ youth recently began offering a support group for at-risk and sexually exploited youth.⁶⁸ The program served 25 sexually exploited young people in 2013.⁶⁹ Finally, The Door, which provides services for New York City youth aged 12-21, served 80 sexually exploited youth between October and December of 2013. If each of these cases are unique, that means 458 sexually exploited young people had contact with ACS or DYCD in 2013.

CONCLUSION

Today the Committees hope to learn more about how DHS, DYCD, and ACS identify and care for RHY and sexually exploited youth in New York City.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 6.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 4.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 7.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 8.

⁶⁸ New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Youth and Community Development, *Local Law 23 of 2013 Annual Report* 11 (2014).

⁶⁹ New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Youth and Community Development, *Local Law 23 of 2013 Annual Report Appendix* 9 (2014).