The New York City Council,
Committee on Youth Services and Committee on General Welfare
April 25, 2014

"Oversight – Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth"

Testimony by
New York City Administration for Children's Services
Susan Morley, Senior Advisor for Investigations

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Good morning Chairs Eugene and Levin and members of the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare. I am Susan Morley, the Administration for Children's Services' Senior Advisor for Investigations and I'm testifying today on behalf of Commissioner Carrión. With me from ACS is Sara Hemmeter, Associate Commissioner for Family and Youth Justice Programs. Also seated next to me from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner of Youth Services and Deborah Harper, Assistant Commissioner for Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work with sexually exploited youth and our efforts to collect data on this population pursuant to Local Law 23.

Overview of Our Programs and Services for Sexually Exploited Youth

Both ACS and DYCD are committed to meeting the needs of young victims of commercial sexual exploitation, commonly referred to as "C-SEC youth." Over the last several years, we and our provider partners have implemented a continuum of care that includes outreach and support services, placement options, and programs. In 2013, New York City received $622,220 in funding from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to enhance our capacity to serve this population. With input from providers, ACS and DYCD developed and implemented a plan to expand our capacity to assist young people who are at risk of and victims of sexual exploitation.

DYCD Programs and Services

DYCD provides core services through its Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program that address the needs of C-SEC youth. DYCD offers emergency services via crisis shelters, which provide emergency shelter and support services, while helping young people to identify a safe place to live. In addition, DYCD contracts with providers who offer services at seven drop-in centers—three in Manhattan and one each in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx—each of which offer food, clothing, and access to counseling, support, and referrals for education, employment and housing.

DYCD also contracts with Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project to conduct street outreach for young people. Streetwork staff offer food, clothing, and information about services, while developing relationships with young people in order to help make appropriate referrals. They can transport youth to safe locations, including their home, a friend or relative, crisis shelters and other safe locations. Through state Safe Harbor funding, Streetwork was able to hire additional staff and to purchase an additional van with a special focus on connecting with at-risk youth who may be absent without leave (AWOL) from ACS foster care placements.

In addition, DYCD contracts with community-based organizations to provide Transitional Independent Living (TIL) homes, including specialized services for young men and women, parenting youth, and LGBTQ youth. Girls and young women who are identified as sexually exploited can be referred to the nationally recognized Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) eight bed Transitional Independent Living Program. Young people in this program receive counseling to address issues associated with exploitation.

Outside of the Runaway and Homeless Youth program, DYCD also manages the City's Summer Youth Employment Program, or SYEP. Young people often have difficulty finding

employment and may become susceptible to the commercial sex industry as a means of survival and economic security. To assist with career development, state funds were allocated to place ACS' at-risk and sexually exploited youth into jobs through SYEP. Youth were engaged in the six week employment program which also focused on educational activities that integrated life-long learning and career planning.

ACS Programs and Services

Since the passage of the Safe Harbor Act in 2008, ACS has worked cross-divisionally to identify C-SEC youth. These efforts include bolstering our investigative work to identify cases of commercial sexual exploitation and training frontline staff. In addition, Children's Services has incorporated the expertise of specialists in our facilities and expanded our specialized foster care, juvenile justice placements, and preventive services.

Identifying suspected cases of sexual exploitation is a fundamental priority for ACS. Prior to my assignment at ACS over eight years ago, I served 21 years at the NYPD—the majority of which was spent investigating sex crimes and child abuse and after rising through the ranks was appointed the first Commanding Officer of the Special Victim's Division. At ACS, I oversee the Investigative Consultant Unit, a team of over 100 retired law enforcement professionals, who assist Child Protective Services (CPS) staff with fact gathering, interviewing and locating at-risk children. CPS involves Investigative Consultants in any potential C-SEC cases. The ICs use investigative databases, social media sites and other resources to assist CPS staff in the investigation. ICs also refer appropriate cases to the NYPD and the FBI.

ACS has also provided our Child Protective Services staff with guidance, training and support to identify C-SEC youth and help them access specialized services. In June 2012, ACS released a comprehensive policy on how to identify, engage and support victims of sexual exploitation and hosted a multi-disciplinary conference at our Children's Center. Since 2010, ACS

staff have participated in several C-SEC trainings. In particular, from November 2012- January 2013, ACS' training academy partnered with Safe Horizon to present nine separate three-hour training sessions to DCP staff, focused on our policy. This past December, through OCFS' Child Right Project, over two hundred ACS and provider agencies staff participated in another training to create "program champions" – knowledgeable resources within their division on this issue.

In partnership with DYCD, ACS incorporated specialized expertise into our facilities by locating youth counselors with experience working with sexually exploited youth at ACS' Children's Center and detention facilities. A dedicated M.S.W. counselor from Safe Horizon was placed at the ACS Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center facility to meet with suspected victims of sexual exploitation and provide necessary support, referrals, and case management. This counselor also facilitates group sessions, consults on individual cases, and trains Children's Center staff. In addition to the work provided by Safe Horizon, GEMS also provides weekly support groups and outreach at both the ACS Children's Center and two juvenile justice facilities that serve girls.

To meet the needs of at-risk and sexually exploited youth in our foster care and juvenile justice placements, ACS contracts with the Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) whose Gateways program provides intensive trauma-informed services including assessment, therapy, and counseling. ACS also contracts with Mt. Sinai-St. Luke's Roosevelt's New Beginnings Program, a unique preventive program which works with 12-17 year olds atrisk of or victims of sexual exploitation, and their families, with the goal of keeping the youth safely in their homes.

ACS and DYCD recognize that at-risk LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. ACS allocated state Safe Harbor funding to three youth providers that have LGBTQ specific expertise and services. First, the Ali Forney Center developed a four-week internship program and began running a weekly psycho-educational group which supports young people who have exchanged sex for money or other resources. Second, the Hetrick-Martin Institute created two

support groups, including one specifically for transgender and gender non-conforming youth, outreach materials describing available support services, and developed a model staff training curriculum focused on identifying and working with sexually exploited LGBTQ youth. The ACS Office of LGBTQ Policy and Practice plans to work with the agency's training academy to implement this training curriculum more broadly. Finally, The Door created a support group for transgender and gender non-conforming youth and a job development group, which assisted youth with resume writing, job searches, as well as setting goals and developing plans toward their career goals.

Developing a Coordinated Agency-Wide Strategic Vision

In addition to expanding supportive services, we recognize the challenges of coordinating services, resources, and care for this vulnerable population. With Safe Harbor funds, ACS commissioned Lynne Echenberg, an attorney and expert in the fields of child welfare and juvenile justice, to provide technical assistance to Safe Harbor grantees. Ms. Echenberg was also tasked with developing an agency-wide strategic plan to address child commercial sexual exploitation in New York City. Her work consisted of meeting with diverse stakeholders including several ACS divisions, provider partners, and youth to survey existing resources, identify gaps, and prioritize future funding and resource allocation. Her comprehensive report identifies ACS' C-SEC efforts as well as areas for further development, such as adopting a validated screening tool; investing in and piloting data collection tools, as well as creating a training plan tailored to frontline workers, clinical staff, and supervisors.

Challenges with Identifying Sexually Exploited Youth

Given the often hidden and coercive nature of sexual exploitation, agency staff and providers face enormous challenges to identifying commercially sexually exploited children. Often times, we encounter young people who are traumatized and fearful and many are understandably reluctant to disclose sexual exploitation. Others feel ashamed. Practice and research also shows that many sexually exploited children do not view themselves as "victims" and will not identify with terms like "sexual exploitation" or "sex trafficking." Many children do not trust either law enforcement or child welfare systems. Identifying sexual exploitation requires much more than posing a list of questions or "checking a box" off a form.

To that end, ACS, DYCD, and our providers focus on building rapport over time with at-risk youth and suspected victims of sexual exploitation. Young people are highly unlikely to disclose commercial sexual exploitation during an initial intake session and it is critical to allow youth to speak openly and comfortably about their experiences in a sensitive manner while recognizing the realities that youth face. Since sexually exploited youth come through ACS' and DYCD's systems through multiple avenues—juvenile justice, child welfare, and homeless services, among others—they may be in contact with multiple caseworkers, providers, and facilities which makes it difficult to develop this rapport. In addition, many of these young people may be transient and/or unable to continuously engage in services. We are continuously striving to better engage youth, which is why we have expanded training, located specialized services within our facilities, and further developed outreach efforts.

Collecting Data for Sexually Exploited Youth

Collecting data is a critical component of our work—it assists in our efforts to evaluate our programs, identify gaps in services, and determine how to allocate scarce resources. Both ACS and DYCD collect data pertaining to sexually exploited youth by gathering regular reports from our

contracted providers which include the number of youth served, the type of services offered; the age and gender of youth, and identification of possible sexual exploitation. ACS obtained demographic data, as provided in our report and appendix, of young people served by Safe Harbor-funded programs from providers, ACS databases, as well as reports from Lynne Echenberg. As discussed in our Local Law 23 report, obtaining all the figures required by the law from vulnerable youth was not always feasible. For example, some providers conduct time-limited outreach with many youth at one time (e.g. Streetwork) and may not be able to obtain complete information from their participants (e.g. the young person's contact with ACS and/or DYCD). In addition, since providers often collect demographic information without identifying information, they may not know whether a young person has been counted previously.

ACS is working to improve the ways that we collect data about the thousands of youth that we serve. ACS divisions work with several distinct case management systems, each of which serves different purposes, some of which are controlled by the state Office of Children and Family Services and others are controlled by ACS. We use state databases to collect and track child welfare and juvenile placement information and we use city databases to collect and track information about our preventive and juvenile detention cases. We are currently evaluating options to collect C-SEC-specific data among these various systems. Improving the state-operated CONNECTIONS system is the most promising option for capturing this data. Currently, caseworkers do not have the ability to electronically "check a box" denoting a child's risk of or involvement in commercial sexual exploitation. Instead, any of this information must be recorded in progress notes. ACS is in the process of evaluating ways to streamline our documentation and reporting systems so that data can be collected and shared more easily.

In addition, ACS is pursuing additional training for staff and implementing best practices screening tools. To that end, ACS and OCFS are planning an additional large-scale training for

later this year. ACS is also currently participating in the testing of a screening tool developed for the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in collaboration with OCFS, IOFA's Child Right Project and Loyola University's Center for the Human Rights of Children. Once the testing is completed, this screening tool will be the first validated instrument in the country developed specifically for young minor victims of trafficking.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the important work we are doing to address the needs of sexually exploited children and document the number of youth in this population. We are grateful for all of the support of the Council as we continue to work to improve services for the City's most vulnerable young people. We are happy to take any questions you may have.

Testimony to the Youth Services Committee of NYC Council
Data Collection Oversight
4-25-14
James Bolas, Executive Director, Coalition for Homeless Youth

My name is James Bolas, and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Homeless Youth (also known as Empire State Coalition). I am also the consulting Project Director for the RHY Training and Technical Assistance Center's HTR3 Anti-Trafficking Project which is funded by HHS Family and Youth Service Bureau.

I want to thank you for letting me testify at this hearing on Data Collection. I also welcome Councilmember Mathieu Eugene into this role as the Chair of the Youth Services Committee. The members of our coalition and homeless youth services community certainly look forward to an on-going successfully collaborative relationship with this committee and Chairman Eugene.

The Coalition for Homeless Youth, formerly known as Empire State Coalition, is the only statewide consortium of providers serving homeless, runaway and street-involved youth in New York State. We provide professional development of homeless youth agencies in NYS through our extensive clinical and programmatic webinar-based training institute. We also coordinate services and resources for homeless youth in NYS and since 1999, have hosted and managed the NYC Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations and produced 5 bi-annual State of Homeless Youth in NYC Reports.

In our 40th year of history, we have seen only two comprehensive studies identifying the number of homeless youth in NYC. The first was in the 80's and the second was in 2007 when our Coalition decided it had been long enough without this necessary data and sought the funding from NYC Council and this committee to conduct a survey.

At that point we, over a period of 3-4 weeks, we certified providers through our IRB in collaboration with Columbia University and The New School to interview over 1000 homeless youth in NYC, of which an estimated 945 interviews were useable. In collaboration with Columbia and the New School we found that on any given night there were an estimated 3,800 youth living on the streets of NYC. The tool we used lasted 15-20 minutes and youth were reimbursed for their time. We conducted interviews in programs as well as on the street in locations such as Union Square, the Piers and through the work of Street Outreach Workers across the city. We involved youth in this process and went to Apple Stores, McDonalds, subways...many places, we found that the DHS policy does not cover in their annual point in time count. In that survey we asked youth to identify where they slept in previous nights. One of those questions was with a sex work client of which we found, at that time 150 youth self-identified.

We understand that Trafficking, as a formally defined issue is stilll relative new, however programs serving homeless and disenfranchised youth were essentially founded on protection sexually exploited youth. We also know that it takes a process to engage a young person to have them trust you to say that they have been sexually exploited. Many young people, in order to emotionally survive the streets have to flip the perception and turn it into an ego strength. We also know that Trafficking still does not have clear strategies for engaging young men who have sex with men and predominatly focuses their services on the female gender without specific consideration for the transgender community. We are also confronted with a limited, if any, approach toward labor trafficking which is rife throughout NYC, particularly within, as we have found through some of our anti-trafficking trainings, the Asian-American community. We also know that in the process of identifying individuals who are being or at risk of being trafficked you must make services available. Currently there are still severely limited services available to trafficked youth in NYC, particularly in the availability of beds and counseling and alternative support services such as employment training.

We have made numerous recommendations for counting homeless youth.

First and foremost, you cannot expect to conduct a study or count of homeless youth without it being properly funded. We have estimated at a minimum of $200,000 are needed to successfully conduct a study/count. On the federal level there is encouragement for $2M to do a national prevalence study…and the Senators and Congress members we presented that to suggested that that number was low!

The design of the homeless youth count should be evidence-informed. This means, first and foremost, including homeless youth in designing the counting process, and, secondly, including homeless youth service providers in this process. DHS and DYCD should provide adequate resources to homeless youth and service providers to competently conduct the count. All meetings relevant to the design and administration of the count should be democratic and include all relevant stakeholders. Any snapshot count of homeless youth should be conducted over the span of weeks at minimum, not one night.

Any count of homeless youth should be seasonally appropriate (i.e. spring or summer). Unsheltered and unaccompanied homeless youth who utilize drop-in services during typical operational hours during counting periods should be included in the final tally given to the federal government.

A successful count needs to have youth-specific counting teams composed of homeless youth and homeless youth service providers. DHS should incorporate homeless youth and homeless youth service providers in each of their counting teams. DHS should consult with youth, youth-specific street-outreach teams, and homeless youth service providers on where to best locate homeless youth on the street. DHS should specifically include young adult "decoys" in the HOPE count as a control mechanism in its methodology. If DHS intends to delegate any responsibility to DYCD for the youth count then DHS should include street homeless youth counted in DYCD-administered counts into its

report given to the federal government.

The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development funded spaces should be funded to stay open at night for homeless youth who choose to come in to be counted, but this cannot be the only or even the main youth-specific counting mechanism administered by city government.

During the counting period DYCD should figure out a mechanism to include and provide resources to drop-in centers that serve homeless youth but are not typically funded by the agencyso that a more comprehensive estimate can be obtained.

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Testimony of Jayne Bigelsen, Director of Anti-Human Trafficking Initiatives

Before

The New York City Council: Youth Services and

General Welfare Committees

Chair: Council Member Mathieu Eugene

Chair: Council Member Stephen Levin

On the Subject of

Oversight: Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth.

(April 25, 2014)

I am Jayne Bigelsen, Director of Anti-Human Trafficking Initiatives/External Affairs at Covenant House New York (CHNY), where we work with homeless, runaway, trafficked and at-risk youth ages 16-20. First, I would like to express our appreciation to both Chairperson Eugene and the Youth Services Committee and Chairperson Levin and the General Welfare Committee Council Members here today for holding this hearing and offering us the opportunity to testify. In recent years, the City Council has been an important leader in both the fight against human trafficking and in support of homeless youth, which we know will continue under Council Member Eugene and Levin's leadership, and for which we are extremely grateful.

CHNY is the nation's largest, privately funded, non-profit adolescent care agency serving this population. Last year, CHNY served over 3,000 young people in our residential programs, Drop-In Center and through our street outreach efforts. Our Crisis Center is open twenty-four hours a day, seven-days a week. Once the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter are met, our young people receive a comprehensive continuum of care including medical care, educational and employment assistance, legal services, transitional housing, substance abuse counseling, and mental health services. Over 60% of our funding is from non-governmental sources.

My testimony today will focus on Local Law Number 23 of 2013 which requires DYCD and ACS to submit a yearly report to Council, no later than January 1, 2014 and yearly thereafter regarding the number of sexually exploited youth in DYCD and ACS custody.

CHNY firmly understands the importance and need for data in regards to commercially sexually exploited youth and therefore has always supported Local Law 23. As you all well know, it is difficult to design programs or allocate funds without a realistic understanding of the true number of young people who have experienced trafficking. Most importantly, we cannot provide a young person with the proper services and assistance unless they disclose their trafficking experiences. Yet as trafficking is a hidden crime that youth are reluctant to disclose, reported numbers are historically low. As an example, currently the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, which confirms and reports trafficking victims across New York State, has only reported 297 trafficking victims since 2007. Yet a study by Covenant House/Fordham University released in 2013 found that approximately 15% of sampled clients had experiences that fit the federal definition of trafficking, and another 8% felt they had no choice but to engage in survival sex. If these numbers were to hold for the entirety of the 3000 youth we see each year, we can deduce that CHNY serves approximately 750 youth each year

who have either been victims of sex trafficking or engaged in survival sex. This demonstrates the vast discrepancy between reported and actual numbers.

However, despite our desire for better data and our support of Local Law 23, in practice it is extremely difficult to obtain an accurate count of trafficking survivors. Until appropriate training and funding is in place, numbers can be expected to be artificially low. In the previously mentioned Fordham University/CHNY trafficking prevalence study, we developed and scientifically validated a screening tool to assist in identifying young survivors of trafficking among our clients. However, one of the first things we learned from that study was that despite scientifically validated questions, a young person is not going to disclose their trafficking experiences until they are ready to do so and will only disclose to someone they trust. For this reason, the timing of asking trafficking related questions poses a problem for all service providers and agencies attempting to identify survivors. If one asks the questions at intake, young people will not have had a chance to learn to trust the provider and will be less likely to disclose the experiences. But if service providers wait until trust has had a chance to develop, young people may no longer be in crisis programs, which are short-term.

Trafficking identification also requires extensive time and training of staff. For example, the trafficking tool that CHNY developed in conjunction with Fordham University takes over an hour to administer per client. Yet regardless of the amount of time spent, caseworkers without the requisite training will inevitably fail to identify a large number of victims. Finally, a young person will be especially reluctant to disclose if there are no services that occur as a result of that disclosure. If there is no availability for specialized/dedicated trafficking beds or specialized programming, a young person might be reluctant to recount traumatic experiences. Ultimately, the trafficking experiences of our youth are their experiences to share, and they will only do so

when they wish to, which often is dependent on time to build relationships and staff with extensive training in trafficking identification.

For these reasons, improving identification to achieve anything close to an accurate picture of trafficking experiences amongst our youth requires more than a law requiring reporting. It requires training of all staff of service providers and government agencies working with this population, funding, extensive time, and specific anti-trafficking resources to ensure that once a youth does identify as a trafficking survivor, there will be an appropriate service response. However, this does not mean that we are opposed to the reporting requirement in the mean time, but rather that it be understood that current numbers should be expected to be much lower than the true prevalence of trafficking experiences.

Finally, I would like to close by discussing concerns related to confidentiality. When a young person opens up about traumatic experiences, they expect that information to remain confidential; it is an expectation they have a right to by law according to the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. We have no concerns with aggregate data that does not require specific identifying information, and for this reason we do not have a problem with Local Law 23. However, it is important that in the future, service providers that receive RHY funding are not asked to provide names or identifying information of youth who have had specific experiences.

I close by thanking you for support of services for both runaway and homeless youth and victims of trafficking, as well as for the opportunity to testify today.

coalition for the homeless

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

TESTIMONY OF
COALITION FOR THE HOMELSS
AND
THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

to

New York City Council Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare

on

Data Collection for Runaway and Homeless Youth

Mathieu Eugene, Chair, Committee on Youth Services
Steve Levin, Chair, Committee on General Welfare

April 25, 2014
New York, New York

Prepared and Presented by:

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Theresa Moser, Staff Attorney, Juvenile Rights Practice, The Legal Aid Society

Good morning. I am Kimberly Forte, Supervising Attorney of the LGBT Law and Policy Initiative. We submit this testimony on behalf of Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society, and thank Chairs Eugene and Levin and all of the committee members for inviting our input on the importance of data collection for issues concerning New York City's homeless youth population. We applaud the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare for continuing to tackle this important subject, and look forward to the valuable contributions that we are sure the new chairs and the Council will make in this area of vital concern to our City's children.

About the Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society

Coalition for the Homeless

Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which now continues past its third decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation around the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates twelve direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers, and demonstrate effective, long-term solutions. These programs include supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS, job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women, rental assistance which provides rent subsidies and support services to help working homeless individuals rent private-market apartments, and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes 900 nutritious meals each night to street homeless and hungry New Yorkers. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction

prevention assistance, client advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits.

The Coalition also brought the landmark litigation on behalf of homeless men and women in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch and remains a plaintiff in Callahan. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan in which it was agreed that, "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults.

The Legal Aid Society

The Legal Aid Society, the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 25 locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of the City.

The Society operates three major legal practices – Civil, Criminal and Juvenile Rights – and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by the Society's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession. The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for

homeless women and men in the Callahan and Eldredge cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the McCain/Boston litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits some two million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a Statewide and national impact.

Context for New York City's Current Runaway and Homeless Youth Services

In order to consider how data collection can appropriately record and reflect the demographics and needs of the runaway and homeless youth (RHY) population, we must first understand the complexity of the current system and then understand the inaccuracies embedded in the current system for data collection. One of the many problems that contributes to the lack of adequate data is that multiple agencies touch the average youth. New York City provides services to RHY primarily through two different systems that often present disparate access to shelter and services. A young person who is 19 years old and is seeking shelter will have a completely different experience if she enters shelter through Division for Youth and Community Development (DYCD) than if she were to enter shelter through the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Moreover, RHY often interact with the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Department of Education (DOE), various hospitals and health care centers, and sometimes the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Interacting with so many systems can impair the youth's ability to actually plan and prepare for their own independence, especially since these systems do not regularly share data and information about this population.

DYCD providers are mindful about how to reach homeless youth in need and focus on trying to create individualized plans for youth in shelter to ensure they obtain long-term housing. Additionally,

there are services for distinct populations of youth that are at the greatest risk of being homeless, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and trafficked youth. However, this system has just under 300 beds, including crisis shelters and transitional independent living programs (TILs) for the thousands of youth that need shelter. This requires RHY to wait, sometimes for weeks, to access a bed and related services. Additionally, this system limits the amount of time a youth can spend in crisis shelter and provides no systemic due process if a youth is discharged from shelter.

In addition, there is no meaningful space for runaway and homeless youth under 18 years of age to get shelter in the current system. DHS only accepts individuals who are over 18 years old; while there are a few beds for them in the DYCD system, homeless youth under 18 years old are often required to leave the shelter sooner than older youth. Some under 18 year olds seek assistance from ACS to enter foster care or assist them with somewhere to stay, many with the aid of DYCD service providers. Historically, the ACS response was to say the youth could return home while discounting the reasons the youth became homeless, which for many RHY are severe familial discord and rejection.

The process for homeless youth to receive shelter and services from DHS does not take into account how RHY, who are defined in the provider community as being between the ages of 16 and 24 years old, are different from adults. Most homeless youth find themselves in large shelters with other populations who not only have different needs, but are often homeless for different reasons. Youth in DHS' shelters are not able to apply for or enter TILs despite there being no legal restriction on their application to these programs. Youth in DHS shelters are not provided with casework staff who have been trained to understand the distinct needs of the RHY population. DHS has no distinct shelters or services for populations who are disproportionately represented in shelter such as LGBT youth and trafficked youth. DHS does have two youth focused shelters, one for young men and one for young women, but placements in these shelters appear to be based on bed availability at the time of admission rather than a targeted process.

Youth in DYCD and DHS shelters regularly apply for supportive housing with HRA. This process proves to be incredibly challenging for homeless youth, especially those with disabilities. The decision whether a youth who qualifies for supportive housing is accepted is left to a single person, and a lack of clear standards makes the reasoning underlying a denial unclear. Since there is no appeals process for denials, many youth remain in shelters that are not meeting their needs or they cannot adequately plan for other more appropriate housing options. Additionally, there are no time frames for when HRA must approve or deny an application or, once an application is approved, for transitioning a youth from shelter. As a result, there is no way RHY or providers can plan for transition. Moreover, without an organized tracking system there is no way of knowing how many youth within the DYCD and DHS systems do qualify for supportive housing.

In short, New York City needs to dissolve the silos of service provision and create a network between all City agencies serving RHY in order to coordinate efforts and maximize services and success for homeless youth. Perhaps many of the current issues pertaining to data collection could be alleviated if the systems shared some of their data about this population. Regardless, in order to accurately understand the needs of this population and adequately serve them, the City must develop a system for gathering comprehensive data from all agencies that work with RHY and use the data effectively. We believe the following recommendations can greatly improve the City's shelters and services to homeless youth.

New York City Should Expand Its Definition of Homeless Youth

The City limits its definition of homeless youth to the one that exists in the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (NYS RHYA), which only acknowledges a homeless youth up to 21 years old. The City should match the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, which now defines homeless youth to include those up to 24 years of age. This step would have great impact on this vulnerable population. Adolescent brain development research consistently shows that youth in

their early twenties continue to experience the same thought processes and challenges that impact teenagers. Targeted interventions for homeless teenagers and young adults are key to reducing the myriad of risk factors. However, failing to include all of the youth who could benefit from these interventions by limiting access to those under 21 is undercutting potential positive impacts of these programs. Investing resources into homeless youth ages 21 to 24 would help to decrease the number of youth in the correctional system, increase youth employment, assist youth in obtaining long-term housing, and afford more youth the opportunity to work on their education and skill building. In short, in order to meaningfully evaluate the effectiveness of RHY programs, the definition should be expanded and the City should assess outcomes for the entire population of RHY.

All City Agencies Serving Youth Should Drastically Improve Inter-agency Communication to Improve Services to Homeless Youth

Poor communication among City agency personnel and service providers who interact with RHY works to the detriment of this vulnerable population. For example, DYCD providers that must help youth apply for benefits and supportive housing do not have access to or working relationships with HRA staff that would enable them to communicate easily when vital information is missing from a youth's application . This can cause service provision delays or an incorrect denial. Similarly, when a minor in a DYCD program or shelter needs assistance, the providers do not have a key contact at ACS whom they can call. DYCD providers are required to utilize the State Central Register (SCR) when abuse or neglect is suspected, but the SCR often fails to forward the report to the local district for investigation on behalf of RHY, or only a cursory investigation is done. In addition to the SCR, historically there has not been a contact between DYCD and ACS in order to ensure that minors receive appropriate placement and services.[1] Third, DHS intake shelters frequently tell young homeless men

[1] Providing a direct contact at ACS would not be inconsistent with State regulations relevant to RHY, which require that RHY program staff report to the SCR or local child protective service, as appropriate, where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a youth under the age of 18 years has been abused, maltreated or neglected.

and women that they should go to DYCD for shelter without allowing them to continue with intake at the adult shelter.

These are only three examples that demonstrate the importance of interagency connections. Communication must improve between all City agencies serving RHY, but particularly between DYCD and DHS. Not only should there be individuals tasked with understanding the RHY population, but there should also be regular communications surrounding issues of capacity and service provision as well as access, in order to ensure fewer RHY are left to sleep on the street or in the subway. Moreover, agencies may in fact keep data and other information that could be helpful to another section of the government that is working with RHY. Increased communication will also prevent duplicative data collection and possibly minimize the amount of time it takes for this population to access services.

The HOPE Count Underestimates the Number of Runaway and Homeless Youth in NYC

It is notoriously difficult to measure with any accuracy the number of unsheltered homeless adults in New York City. This is why the HOPE estimates -- which are based on a survey (not an enumeration) conducted on a single night each year -- have been criticized by advocates for so many years. But the challenges in measuring the number of unsheltered runaway and homeless youth are even greater. For instance, many unsheltered homeless youth find very temporary, often single-night, accommodations – often called "couch-surfing" -- and are thus not captured in any surveys. Other homeless youth who are trafficked and/or engaging in sex work also would not be captured in surveys. And like a significant portion of unsheltered homeless adults, many unsheltered homeless youth sleep in non-visible locations on the streets or seek temporary refuge in all-night restaurants or hospital emergency rooms, and thus are not captured in single-night surveys like the City's HOPE estimate. In order for there to be a good estimate of RHY in NYC, DYCD and DHS must engage in an open dialogue with service providers, advocates and youth prior to any future efforts to survey or count the number of homeless youth in our city.

All Homeless Youth Should Have Access to Appropriate Services

The service models for homeless youth in DYCD shelter and DHS are drastically different. The DYCD system is governed by state regulations under the NYS RHYA to create programs and deliver services. DHS does not apply these standards when providing shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth their shelters. RHY should have access to comparable services regardless of which shelter and shelter system they are residing in. For example, DHS should regularly assist qualifying homeless youth apply for TILs. DHS should be expanding the number of shelters designated for youth aged 18 – 24 so that youth receive services comparable to those in DYCD shelters. Additionally, the number of DYCD beds must increase in order to provide these focused services to more RHY. All this should be done with the recognition that shelters and TILs set aside for distinct populations are needed to serve the unique needs of youth who are at the highest risk of homelessness. Additionally, DHS shelters who serve youth between the ages of 18 - 24 years old should educate staff on best practices of working with youth who are trafficked and/or engaging in sex work. For those youth in DHS who openly identified as being trafficked or engaging in sex work, DHS must ensure it is assisting youth in engaging in the same services available to youth in ACS's care and DYCD's drop-in centers and shelters.

The City Needs to Increase its Services to Sexually Exploited RHY

We applaud the Council on passing Local Law 23 and continuing to follow-up on this crisis for our youth. The lack of services in New York City for these vulnerable youth is startling. The GEMS program, which provides residential services for young women from the age of 16 to 24, has only 9 beds – and is almost always full to capacity. There are no residential services in New York City for trafficked transgender girls or boys, or for that matter, no non-residential programs specifically to address the needs of sexually exploited transgender girls or boys. For too many RHY youth, the only time that they come into contact with a service provider is if they are arrested for a prostitution related offense. Although helpful to many youth under 16 years of age, New York's Safe Harbor Law was not fully

funded so its intentions of providing safe houses for youth have gone unfilled. This dearth of services leaves many youth to cycle in and out of the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

The relationship between RHY and sex and labor trafficked youth is clear and circular. Youth who have been trafficked feel isolated and stigmatized, and run from homes or foster care placements where they are judged or rejected. Youth who are without resources, particularly access to a crisis bed, or enough time in a crisis shelter to enable them to get housing, job placement and educational assistance, become increasingly vulnerable to traffickers.

The lack of available services remains a huge obstacle to assisting this at risk population. While there are many initiatives planned to improve the identification of sex and labor trafficked youth, identification without intervention is meaningless. The first step is to provide increased funding and access to crisis shelter and transitional living programs. As long as RHY in New York City remain on waiting lists to find shelter, they will be trafficked. The second step is to provide adequately funded services to assist youth involved in all types of trafficking, and to ensure that those services are made available to RHY outside of the criminal justice system. The crisis of trafficked youth demands immediate attention. That one out of four runaway and homeless youth in New York City has been a victim of trafficking is an unacceptable statistic.

The Systems Must Improve and Increase the Provision of Mental Health Services

Too many of the City's youth with mental health disabilities go underserved. Additionally, it is well documented that RHY have experienced multiple traumatic events and situations in their lives including family rejection, sexual assault and exploitation, substance abuse and physical harm. Although DYCD contract providers provide mental health services for homeless youth, these services are not supported or funded by the City or State. Homeless youth can only access mental health evaluations and services at the various DYCD shelters so long as providers are able to raise private funds to pay for them. This is true despite the fact that applications for supportive housing programs require a

psychosocial evaluation. Moreover, research showing that almost 85% of RHY who enter shelters have been exposed to at least one traumatic event and that approximately 90% of RHY enter shelter with a possible diagnosis.[2] In short, it is imperative that RHY have access to focused and appropriate mental health services and counseling.

While youth receiving services from DYCD have difficulty accessing services, they are more likely to get some of what they need than young people living in DHS shelters. RHY in DHS shelters may get a referral for mental health services, but more often they are left to their own devices; DHS interventions are not targeted to help facilitate access to these kinds of services as they are in the DYCD system. Yet youth in the DHS system are the same as youth in the DYCD system who have been identified as needing specialized interventions. These interventions have a greater impact on the RHY's transition out of shelter and back into the community.

As a result, collecting data reflecting how many youth enter the DYCD and DHS shelter systems with diagnoses or with suspected mental health needs could help the City assess the vast need for these services and ultimately facilitate the development of appropriate resources to adequately serve this population. Considering that provider agencies are currently solely responsible for addressing mental health needs in the DYCD system due to the lack of City or State funding, any resources invested by the City in the provision of mental health services to RHY will have a positive impact.

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[2] Both of these studies are referenced in the comprehensive State of the City's Homeless Youth Report 2011, which was completed by the New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth. Gwadz, M. V., Nish, D., Leonard, N. R., & Strauss, S. M. (2007). Gender differences in traumatic events and rates of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among homeless youth. *Journal of Adolescence, 30* (1), 117-129. In this study of trauma and victimization among street-involved youth in New York City, almost all (86%) of youth reported that they had experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetimes, and with most (63.5%) experienced multiple types of trauma. For example, half (51.8%) had some form of sexual trauma, about two-thirds (68.2%) experienced physical assault, and 42.4% had experience some other form of trauma (for example, serious accidents, natural disaster, etc); Feitel, B., Magetson, N., Chamas, J., Lipman, C. 1992. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry,* February, Volume 43(2), p. 155–159.

Conclusion

There are basic structural changes that need to be made to the RHY system either before or in conjunction with a change in the City's RHY data collection systems. At the core of this change is the need for an increase in capacity, availability of appropriate services to all RHY, and communication between all agencies working with RHY in New York City. In order to accurately understand the needs of this population and adequately serve them, the City must develop a system for gathering comprehensive data from all agencies, advocates and service providers that work with RHY and use the data effectively. These changes will allow for more streamlined services and perhaps reduce duplicative data collection and service provision, ensuring the most beneficial use of limited resources.

We thank you for giving Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society the opportunity to speak about this important topic.

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April 25, 2014

Testimony before the New York City Council

Hearing on Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth

Sarah Meckler, LCSW
Supervisor of Homeless Youth Services, The Door

Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to testify on Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth. I am Sarah Meckler, Supervisor of Homeless Youth Services at The Door. The Door is a large multi-service youth development agency providing a full range of integrated services at a single site to approximately 11,000 New York City youth between the ages of 12-24 each year. We serve over 2,000 homeless youth a year through our Drop-in Center and Street Outreach programs. For the past six months, we have also been providing services geared toward the CSEC (Commercially Sexually Exploited Children) population through the ACS - Safe Harbor programming.

Since we have begun gathering data on Sexually Exploited Youth we have averaged a total of 24 new reports of sexual exploitation each month, for a total of 146 youth over the past six months. 89% of young people reporting commercial sexual exploitation were homeless, 66% were female, 33% male, 50% were LGBQ, and 50% were heterosexual. The average age was 20. While this is a start of being able to better understand the needs of this population we do not think it is a truly accurate count of the population. The only time we are able to comprehensively assess every young person who walks through our door for sexual exploitation is upon an initial intake that is conducted the first day they come to The Door. Most young people do not feel comfortable enough disclosing this highly sensitive information until they have built trust with someone. For example, one of the services we provided through Safe Harbor was a support group for transgender youth who are at-risk for sexual exploitation. It was only after 2-3 months of meeting weekly that the participants started to feel comfortable enough to disclose their own experiences with sex work. While we do try to capture new reports of sexual exploitation after intake by having certain key staff update data we have not yet been able to create a comprehensive system for this. Another challenge is the varied definitions of sexual exploitation in use. Sexual exploitation could be sexual abuse, being forced into commercial sex , or trading sex for survival. We need a clearer and more detailed definition of what we are reporting on. For example, one of the screening questions we use is "Have you ever felt like you had to exchange sex for money, food, drugs, or a place to stay?". While we consider an affirmative answer to this question survival sex or sexual exploitation and include it in our reports, others may not consider it to meet a stricter definition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

The Door recently had the opportunity to participate as the New York site for the National Family and Youth Services Bureau 2013 Street Outreach Program Data Collection Project and was able to obtain additional data on homeless youth who trade sex. 42% of the homeless youth surveyed stated they had agreed to be sexual with someone because they needed a place to stay, food, drugs, protection or money. The number one reason they reported trading sex was for a place to spend the night. Overall, NYC homeless youth reported trading sex at higher rates than homeless youth nationwide. 62% of those who had traded sex were Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual indentified; 38% were heterosexual. 42% of those who had traded sex identified as

transgender in some way. 42% identified as female and 38% male. Those who had traded sex scored much higher on the CES-D depression scale indicating the need for further evaluation for depression. 63% of those who had traded sex reported being sexually abused by an adult as a minor, compared to only 28.6% of those who had not traded sex. Twenty percent of the respondents reported that they had been asked by a romantic partner to have sex with someone else in exchange for money.

This information is similar to other recent studies on homeless youth and sexual exploitation, such as the study from Covenant House last year. While it is helpful to keep collecting data on sexual exploitation of homeless youth we do know enough at this point to start taking action. We have extremely limited resources relative to the number of homeless youth in New York City. It is estimated that we currently have enough youth shelter beds for about 10% of the homeless youth present in New York City on any given night. The numbers of homeless youth at our Drop-in Center are 50% greater than what we are funded for; however we keep facing significant budget cuts that threaten our ability to provide basic services such as food, clothing, and case management. When our Drop-in program closes in the evenings, we routinely have to say goodnight to homeless youth knowing they have no shelter bed to go to because there are none available. When young people don't have an age-appropriate shelter bed to go to and no income they are extremely vulnerable to being sexually trafficked, and many feel they have no choice but to engage in sex work in order to have a place to sleep and food to eat.

While it is important to start taking immediate actions to address the needs of sexually exploited and homeless youth in the city, at the same time, we are still in need of an accurate count of homeless youth that utilizes a methodology specifically designed for this population. The last survey considered to give the most accurate count in NYC was done in seven years ago through the Empire State Coalition. We are unable to get an accurate count of homeless youth using the traditional methods of the Hope Count because homeless youth do not congregate in the same ways as the adult homeless population and are much harder to identify. The Empire State Coalition of Homeless and Street Involved Youth Organizations prepared a policy briefing making recommendations on ways to make the count more successful in the future. Including homeless youth and homeless youth service providers in the planning of the count is key. The study also needs to be funded, as the 2007 study was, and those participating in the study need to be given enough resources to complete the study. It is essential that the survey needs to be conducted over a period of several weeks and during a seasonally appropriate time, not just over one evening during the early morning hours on the coldest night of the year. Homeless youth who utilize homeless youth services should be counted in the study and not just youth who are visible on the public streets. Homeless Youth Street Outreach teams should be utilized in the count and homeless youth who hang out in various indoor locations (i.e. fast food restaurants, businesses, etc.) should also be counted. It is important for us to develop and complete a successful count of homeless youth in NYC so we have a better understanding of the amount of resources we need for this population.

Despite the challenges, we do have a beginning understanding of the sexual exploitation of homeless youth in NYC. If we want to address the issue of sex trafficking amongst New York City's youth, we must provide them with stable housing, alternative forms of income, and support services such as counseling, health care, and case management. Due to the high prevalence of sexually trafficked youth among New York City's homeless youth population, we must provide adequate funding and resources for the Runaway and Homeless Youth system so we can prevent youth from being sexually trafficked. It is also important that we get an accurate count of homeless youth in NYC utilizing a methodology designed specifically for this population. With this information, it is my hope that we can come closer to addressing the needs of this highly vulnerable population.

Sarah Meckler, LCSW
Supervisor of Homeless Youth Services, The Door

Testimony of

Stephanie Gendell, Esq.
Associate Executive Director
For Policy and Government Relations
Citizens' Committee for Children

Before the

New York City Council
Youth Services and General Welfare Committees

Oversight Hearing:

Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth

April 25, 2014

Good morning. My name is Stephanie Gendell and I am the Associate Executive Director for Policy and Government Relations at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 70-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

I would first like to thank Chairs Eugene and Levin and the members of the Youth Services and General Welfare Committees for holding this important hearing and providing us with the opportunity to testify.

I. Why Data Collection on Runaway and Homeless Youth is Important

Runaway and homeless youth (RHY) are some of the most vulnerable youth in New York City. Homelessness in and of itself is traumatic for young people and research has shown that homeless youth experience high rates of violence, sexual assault, illness, and behavioral disorders.[1] Homeless youth may also engage in survival sex and drug use as a way to cope with being homeless.[2] Thus, there are many issues a homeless youth is facing in addition to needing a stable place to live.

These youth require specific services in order to help them become mature, successful adults who can thrive as active participants in society. In order to help homeless youth overcome the myriad of issues and obstacles they face, it is important to know how many homeless youth there are and the key demographics, such as their race/ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, as well as mental health needs. It is only through knowing how many RHY there are, and their needs, that we can ensure New York City has the full continuum of services available for them, including shelter beds, mental health services, health care, education and job training, etc.

Given the importance of knowing the scope of need for runway and homeless youth services, there have been several attempts to approximate and/or count homeless youth.

Nationally, a 2009 study by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), found 22,700 unaccompanied youth across the country.[3] A 2004 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimated the number much higher at 1.6 million.[4] In New York City, we have long-estimated that there are over 3,800 youth under 24 who are homeless and unsheltered and several thousand more in the City's various shelter systems. This estimate is based on a 2008 study conducted by the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services with the assistance of Columbia University. Most recently, as a supplement to the official HOPE Count, there was a Youth Count conducted in January 2013. While this was a tremendous collaborative effort that produced invaluable information, as discussed more fully in this testimony, the Youth Count did not capture all homeless youth.

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[1] Urban Institute, Youth Count! Process Study, July 2013 at page 1. Available at: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412872-youth-count-process-study-2.pdf

[2] *Id.*

[3] Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan for Preventing Homelessness, 2010, at page 15. Available at: http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Opening%20Doors%202010%20FINAL%20FSP%20Prevent%20End%20Homeless.pdf

[4] Urban Institute, Youth Count!, *supra* note 1 at 6.

In addition, we think it is important to note that in 2006 CCC released a report based on our research and surveys with homeless youth, in which our first recommendation was to "improve data collection efforts among city agencies that serve homeless youth." Within that recommendation, we suggested that the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) should improve methods of data collection and analysis because little information was known on how many young people sought homeless services and this was imperative to informing policies around prevention and service needs.[5]

To ensure the City has the continuum of services that meet the many needs of homeless youth, we need an accurate and reliable count to determine how many youth are actually in need. While there have been several efforts to quantify the need to date, if we can secure more accurate data on homeless youth, we will better understand the kinds of services this diverse population needs and help us ensure the appropriate number of slots for services exist.

II. Sexually Exploited Youth: Local Law 23

One of the most vulnerable groups of youth, if not the most vulnerable, is sexually exploited youth- many of whom are also homeless. While appreciating the difficulty in both identifying and counting these young people who may not disclose or come into contact with city agency staff, CCC supported the passage of Local Law 23. This 2013 law requires DYCD and ACS to provide an annual report to the City Council on the number of sexually exploited youth that came into contact with DYCD's RHY services or ACS. Prior to this law, estimates about the size and needs of this population were often based upon a 2007 OCFS report that estimated that there were approximately 2,253 sexually exploited youth in NYC.[6]

In preparation for today's hearing, the City Council has drafted a briefing paper which includes information provided by ACS and DYCD in their first Local Law 23 report submitted to the Council. The ACS/DYCD report identifies the challenges in identifying children who have been sexually exploited, such as young people not admitting it or not identifying themselves as victims and the reluctance for young people to disclose this information during intake sessions. That said, ACS and DYCD have used the Safe Harbor funds they received from the state to help them better identify these young people, including the addition of a sexually exploited youth counselor at the Children's Center where youth entering ACS's system often enter. While state Safe Harbor funds remain one-year Legislative additions, CCC is pleased that the legislature nearly doubled their appropriation this year from $1.65 million to $3 million and we hope NYC will receive additional funding.

Regardless of these inherent difficulties, according to the Council Briefing Paper, ACS and DYCD came into contact (through various sources) 458 sexually exploited youth (although this may be a duplicated count) in 2013. This is a significant number of young people/contacts and

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[5] Young and Homeless: A Look at Homeless Youth in New York City, March 2006. Citizens' Committee for Children.

[6] NYS Office of Children and Family Services, "New York Prevalence Study of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children." 2007.

indicates how critical it is for the City to ensure there is a continuum of services for these young people.[7]

III. The 2013 Youth Count in New York City

New York City conducted its first ever Youth Count on January 28, 2013 to attempt to count street homeless youth and young adults. This count was conducted on the same evening as the Department of Homeless Services' (DHS) annual Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) count. New York City participated in this national youth count as one of nine pilot sites across the country. In New York, the count was done in collaboration with the New York City Coalition in the Continuum of Care, the New York City Department of Homeless Services and the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services. CCC and our volunteers had the opportunity to assist in this this historic youth count and we are grateful to everyone who worked hard on this collaborative effort to quantify youth homelessness.

On the night of January 28, 2013, there were 1,420 homeless youth officially identified: 710 in the DHS homeless shelter system; 253 in the DYCD RHY system; and 128 on the street identified in the HOPE count. There were an additional 182 youth (132 of whom met the HUD definition of homelessness) identified through the Youth Count.

The 2013 HOPE count estimated a total of 3,180 unsheltered people sleeping on the streets on the night of January 28th. Of those, only 128 were under the age of 25 and were reported as the city's official estimate of street homeless youth.[8] This number is surprisingly low since providers and advocates who have conducted previous counts of homeless youth in New York City have numbers ranging in the thousands. While the count was a good first start and had good intentions, due to the low number of homeless youth reported we cannot rely on the 2013 count as an official number of all homeless youth.

The reason behind the low numbers was primarily due to the methodology used for the count. The number of youth counted for the HOPE count was collected by checking a limited number of trains, a portion of city streets and places that are visible from the streets.[9] The count was also conducted on one of the coldest nights of the year, which means there was a high chance that anyone sleeping on the street may be staying in hidden places in an attempt to stay warm. Homeless youth have a greater chance than most street homeless to keep themselves hidden as a result of their negative experiences with police, institutions, trauma and vulnerabilities to street

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[7] According to the Council Briefing Paper, the contacts were as follows: 102 youth who had contact with DYCD; 38 additional sexually exploited youth referred from ACS to DYCD's Summer Youth Employment Program; 31 young people served by JCCA's Gateways foster care program; 10 at JCCA's non-secure placement residence; 94 cases at the Mt. Sinai- St. Luke's Roosevelt New Beginnings preventive service program; 80 through the Ali Forney Center; 25 through the Hetrick-Martin Institute; and 80 at the Door.

[8] Counting Homeless Youth Matters And NYC Can Do Better: Briefing Report on the 2013 Point-in-Time Count of Street Homeless Youth and Recommendations for 2014. NYC Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations & Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services. Available at: http://www.empirestatecoalition.org/main/pdf/2013%20NYC%20Youth%20Count%20Briefing%20Report%20Response-%20Counting%20Homeless%20Youth%20Matters.pdf

[9] Counting Homeless Youth Matters *supra* note 6 at 2.

violence.[10] Therefore, one can assume that many homeless youth were not in plain sight from the street and were not counted. In addition, the HOPE count failed to capture youth who may couch surf, engage in sex for a place to stay, be living doubled up in public housing, sleeping in emergency rooms, abandoned buildings, or any other place not visible from the street.[11]

On the same night, the new Youth Count was conducted by counting youth who come to DYCD funded drop-in centers and some supportive housing providers. A total of 182 additional youth came to the 14 drop-in centers (which were left open overnight) and 5 supportive housing residences; 132 of these youth met the HUD definition of homelessness. These homeless youth counted at these locations were not added to the official number submitted to the federal government because they were considered sheltered and the HOPE count is of unsheltered individuals.[12] In addition, non-DYCD funded drop-in centers were not asked to participate and if a youth came to a DYCD-funded center during the day but did not return between 10:00 pm and 4:00 am they were not counted.[13]

At the participating locations, a survey was given to unsheltered youth in order to gain a better understanding of the demographics of homeless youth. In total, there were 182 respondents and of them 132 met the HUD definition of homelessness and their answers were counted in the survey. The survey results show that the majority of homeless youth come from minority populations.[14] Of the survey respondents, 90 percent were Latino or Black, 34 percent were Lesbian, Gay or bisexual, and 6 percent were transgendered.[15] The average length of time a youth was homeless was an alarming 927 days, which is close to 2 and half years.[16] There were low levels of educational attainment and employment among respondents: 47 percent had less than a high school diploma, 21 percent were currently enrolled in school, 22 percent were employed, and 63 percent were disconnected, which means that they were not in school and not employed.[17] Fifty-three percent of the youth that had graduated from high school also had experience with the criminal justice system,[18] which demonstrates that homeless youth often come into contact with multiple City agencies. Fighting frequently with parents and experiencing physical, mental or sexual abuse were cited the most often as the reason the youth became homeless, both at 34 percent.[19] Thirty-one percent of respondents reported being kicked out of their home and 20 percent reported parental neglect or parent not meeting basic needs.[20] Lastly, 66 percent of youth in the sample had run away or lived apart from their parents before the age of 18 and 42 percent had been placed in foster care or a group home.[21]

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[10] *Id.*
[11] *Id.*
[12] *Id.*
[13] *Id.*
[14] A Count of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in New York City, November 2013 at page 2. Available at: http://shnny.org/images/uploads/2013-NYC-Homeless-Youth-Report.pdf
[15] *Id.*
[16] *Id.*
[17] *Id.* at 3.
[18] *Id.*
[19] *Id.*
[20] *Id.*
[21] *Id.*

Although the data gathered on January 28, 2013 does not give us a complete count and picture of all homeless youth in New York City, this data is very revealing. It shows us that homeless youth are already part of minority populations and that they are facing difficult obstacles along with their homelessness, such as low educational attainment, incarnation and unemployment.[22] It also shows there are several points in time when we can assist them since they frequently come into contact with multiple City agencies such as the Administration for Children's Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Department of Homeless Services.

IV. Recommendations

In order to better meet the needs of homeless youth in New York City, it is critical that we not only continue this initial count of homeless youth, but also expand the count to ensure we are capturing the numbers and needs of all homeless youth. Therefore, CCC recommends that the City should be responsible for the youth count (DHS and/or DYCD). We believe that having a New York City agency responsible for conducting a homeless youth count gives the number validity and it can be conducted in an accurate and credible manner allowing the findings to be universally accepted.

CCC also recommends that the City change the methodology of the count. In order to learn more about homeless youth and where to find them, the City should speak to homeless providers and homeless youth to help design the counting process. Homeless youth and providers can inform the City on where to best locate street homeless youth and also help determine how and where a survey should be administered.

We look forward to the possibility of working with DHS, DYCD and the City Council in order to develop an annual youth count and create a framework of services to meet the needs of homeless youth in New York City.

In addition, we recommend that the City advocate for a larger allocation of state Safe Harbor funding and that this additional funding be used to not only help identify sexually exploited youth but provide services to them. Notably, while we need to expand the service continuum for all sexually exploited youth, we believe we need to do much more to make sure that the City has services for sexually exploited boys.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. We appreciate the City Council's interest in this very critical issue.

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[22] *Id.*

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Address: 460 W. 41st St #211 NYC, NY 10036

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Harper, Asst Commissioner

Address: DYCD

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Susan Morley, Senior Advisor

Address: ACS

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ~~Susan Mor~~ Sara Hermeter

Address: Assoc Commissioner, ACS

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marsha Haskell, Deputy Comm

Address: DOC Digital

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/25/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan Vizina

Address: _____

I represent: Safe Horizon

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms