

Statement of

# **The Honorable Russ Feingold**

United States Senator  
Wisconsin  
April 29, 2008

Senator Russell D. Feingold  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on "Living on the Street: Finding Solutions to Protect Runaway and Homeless Youth"

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on the critical topic of protecting runaway and homeless youth. This is a very important issue that affects thousands of families throughout the country, including in my state of Wisconsin.

The lack of affordable and safe housing for all Americans is a key contributor to homelessness among adults and young people and much more needs to be done to create additional affordable housing in our country. Increasing numbers of Americans are facing housing affordability challenges and I have heard from many Wisconsinites concerned about the lack of affordable housing, homelessness, and the increasingly severe cost burdens that families have to undertake in order to afford housing.

There are a number of steps that Congress should take this year to provide Americans with more stable affordable housing options and one such step is to reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA.) While the lack of affordable housing contributes to homelessness among our youth, many other issues also impact homelessness among young people ranging from instability at home and abusive situations to disengagement in school and a lack of space in shelters. Homelessness affects millions of young Americans every year and we must do a better job of addressing the educational, housing, and health care needs of these young people through the reauthorization of the RHYA.

Effectively addressing the causes of homelessness requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates supportive services, housing placement, and assistance in locating employment and educational opportunities. The various programs in RHYA, including the Basic Center Program, the Transitional Living Program, and the Street Outreach Program, provide this sort of multifaceted approach that combines immediate shelter needs with counseling, educational, and other services. Advocates who work on homelessness issues in Wisconsin have told me about the important funding that RHYA provides for their work throughout the state and have let me know how much more difficult it would be to get their work done without the RHYA programs.

Shelter is one of our most basic needs and too many young Americans are struggling to have that basic need met. Much more needs to be done to prevent these young people from running away or becoming homeless in the first place, including improving the quality of schools and

employment opportunities as well as providing counseling services for families. We must also take steps to improve and reauthorize the RHYA programs to provide better opportunities for those youth who have run away or are homeless to help bring stability and safety to their lives.

I look forward to working with the Chairman and this Committee in the coming weeks and months to reauthorize the RHYA and improve the delivery of housing and supportive services to our young people in Wisconsin and throughout the country.