

Testimony of  
**Mark Redmond**

April 29, 2008

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Mark Redmond, MPA  
Executive Director, Spectrum Youth and Family Services  
Before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Hearing on the "Living on the Street: Finding Solutions to Protect "Runaway and Homeless Youth

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Leahy and members of the Committee, for this opportunity to address the fundamental role of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in serving young people in our country who are disconnected from family and other supports, many of whom end up living on the streets.

I am the Executive Director of Spectrum Youth and Family Services in Burlington, Vermont, where we are the largest provider of services to homeless and at-risk youth in the state. We have been in existence since 1970 -- in fact, Senator Leahy was one of our early board members. We are also a long-standing member of the National Network for Youth.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorizes three distinct programs. Spectrum is the only nonprofit in Vermont which receives funding for and provides services in all three areas.

The first program within the continuum is Street Outreach. We hire professional, credentialed adults, and college students from nearby St. Michael's College and the University of Vermont and train them to work with this high needs population. Our staff are out every day connecting with the scores of homeless youth in Burlington who are in the abandoned boxcars by Lake Champlain, in the woods near the lake, or living behind restaurants. Our staff know the youth by name, distributing sandwiches, blankets, sleeping bags, gloves, and clothing daily to meet their most basic needs. Our outreach staff use these contacts to build trusting relationships with the youth so that we can get them off the streets and into our shelter.

We also have a drop-in center as part of our street outreach program, right off of the main pedestrian mall in Burlington. Every day of the year, homeless youth can come in and receive a free hot lunch, hot dinner, change of clothing, shower, and access to laundry facilities. There is a free health clinic right next door, run by the Community Health Center of Burlington, where they can see a doctor or nurse. We have four job developers on staff who help kids find employment. We have a full-time teacher to help them get back into high school or take the GED and a part-time staff person who helps them get into college. We have licensed mental health and substance

abuse counselors on staff, because we know that mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction are prevalent among this population.

The second program model of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is called the Basic Center Program (BCP). BCP funds support our 12-bed shelter, which is located above the drop-in center. It too is open every day of the year, and from the moment a youth arrives, the message is, "how can we support you in developing a plan that will get you off the streets permanently?" Our shelter staff also work closely with young people's families to support reunification, if that is possible.

The third program component of the Act is the Transitional Living Program. At Spectrum, this consists of a 9-unit SRO (Single Room Occupancy) building a few blocks away from the shelter. If a young person is in our shelter and cannot be safely reunified with his or her family, he or she then transitions over to the longer-term SRO, where they get a Section 8 lease and their own room. They can stay there for up to 18 months. A few years ago, we developed an aftercare support allowing youth who successfully graduate from the SRO, to receive a Section 8 voucher to take out into the housing market. Others go on to a college dorm, Job Corps, or other safe and stable living situations. Just a month ago, we even had one young man who previously had been homeless -- living in a truck -- leave us successfully to graduate from Paris Island boot camp, as a full-fledged U.S. Marine. Our mission is to help homeless youth develop a plan that will lead to self-sufficiency and independent living.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act supports this work, which is why it is so important to reauthorize it before it sunsets in September. I do offer a few recommendations that would strengthen the programs, however: First, the small state minimum for the Basic Center Program should be increased to \$200,000 from \$100,000. This is currently all that the entire state of Vermont receives, and Spectrum only receives \$18,000 of that, making it very difficult to operate a program. Second, the authorization levels for the consolidated account should be \$200 million and the Street Outreach Programs should be authorized at \$30 million., Spectrum has been level-funded since 1994, and you can only imagine how costs have risen in 14 years while the grant amount stays the same. With more funding available, we can assist youth in exiting the streets and connecting them to school and the workforce. Finally, please extend the amount of time a young person can remain in a Transitional Living Program from 18 months to two years.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.