

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

RHY LEGISLATION: REPORTING AND
IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOW-UP

PRESENTED BY

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER RANDY SCOTT

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Good afternoon, Chair Rose and members of the Youth Services Committee. I am Randy A Scott, Assistant Commissioner for Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth at the Department of Youth and Community Development. My pronouns are he/him. I am joined by Tracey Thorne (she, her), Director of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs.

On behalf of Commissioner Chong, thank you for this opportunity to update the Council on our compliance with various pieces of legislation impacting Runaway and Homeless Youth Services.

2018 was a watershed moment for this Committee and the Council in passing important bills concerning DYCD's portfolio of RHY services. They enshrine into law the work of the de Blasio Administration and the Council to strengthen the Runaway and Homeless Youth system. Non-profit RHY providers and advocates in the City have been unwavering in their commitment and are the unsung heroes and heroes of this important work, which will improve the lives young people for years to come.

To name a few of our major accomplishments, we have more than tripled the number of residential beds, increased the age for residential services to 24, and opened new drop-in centers. There are currently eight DYCD-funded centers to with at least one 24/7 center operating in all of the five boroughs. Young people can now access high quality mental health services in drop in centers and in residences. Finally, initiated by the NYC Unity Project, we expanded resources to address the unique and often unmet needs of LGBTQ youth.

Our system is unparalleled and demonstrates the City as the national leader in fighting youth homelessness and ensuring better outcomes for young people. It could not have come at a more critical time as the City contended with COVID-19. In recognition of that, HUD recently awarded New York City a \$15 million grant as part of the [Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program \(YHDP\)](#). This funding, from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), will support a wide range of new housing and service interventions to prevent and end youth homelessness. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders across all sectors, particularly the young people whose lived experiences will add a critical voice to the work.

Highlights of recent RHY legislation include:

- Local Law 79: Tracking youth unable to access services;
- Local Law 86: Better understanding the needs of young people through demographic data analysis;
- Local Law 87: Extending the time young people can stay in RHY residences;
- Local Law 88: Increasing the age to 24 for some crisis services and TIL programs;
- Local Law 174: A centralized complaint process;
- Local Law 81: Streamlining the process for youth to enter the adult system and tracking situations where a youth experienced barriers accessing DYCD's residential programs; and
- Local Law 4: Finally, in 2019 the Council passed legislation supporting immigrant relief and benefits.

In all these areas, we have made significant progress that I will highlight for you now.

In 2019, RHY was integrated into DYCD Connect, DYCD's data and communication tracking system. DYCD Connect has features to better track RHY including utilization, Discharge Reports,

Demographics, and Program Outcomes. RHY and provider staff utilize can track and monitor the progress of young people across the system to better meet their needs. DYCD Connect allowed RHY to reduce emails and spreadsheets, to a streamlined data system. This has made information required by the Council's legislation more easily accessible.

As previously highlighted, we implemented two key program policies: increasing the time young people may stay in residential programs up to 120 days in Crisis Services programs and 24 months in Transitional Independent Living programs. Following these state and city legislative changes, we also created residential services for youth up to age 24, and we now have four programs with a total of 60 beds for homeless young adults.

We worked closely with providers so that every young person who wants a place to stay can get one. Last Fiscal Year, including the peak of the pandemic, 3,455 youth were placed in a crisis services or transitional independent living program. During this same period, in response to Local Law 79 no young person was reported to be declined a referral to service. Also reported during that period, through the streamlined process under Local Law 81, 69 young people were referred to the adult system.

To better understand the needs of youth we collect and report on details of the size and characteristics of RHY including gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, pregnancy and parenting status, and disabilities. We look at their services needs in areas such as educational assistance, high school proficiency preparation, medical services, mental health services, services for sexually exploited children, and temporary shelter. And, we carefully monitor the dispositions of runaway and homeless youth who exit the program.

We have a system to allow young people to voice their concerns through the Ombudsperson and we have displayed in sites across our system, posters detailing how young people can anonymously and confidentially ask questions, comment and complain about RHY services through 311 and Community Connect (Youth Connect).

Finally, working with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs we created information guides, and facilitated meetings in collaboration with MOIA, to inform youth in need of immigration-related services, including legal help, or other services, how to access available City services and resources. RHY providers give participants information about services and resources related to immigration, including immigration-related legal services. This approach ensures that youth who may need the information will have it, whether or not they have asked for it.

With October being Mental Health Awareness Month, we wanted to share with you with exciting news. Starting November 1, 2021, our drop-in centers will be Mental Health Wellness Hubs. They will administer behavioral assessments and to provide therapy across all RHY programs with the goal of closing service gaps for vulnerable youth.

These are just a few examples of how we fulfilled the letter and spirit of the laws passed by the Council. With November marking National Runaway Prevention Month and National Homeless Youth Awareness month, we look forward to continuing to work with you, advocates, providers, and youth in the time ahead to continue to improve services for youth. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.



Testimony to the New York City Council

Committee on Youth Services

Oversight Hearing on the 2018 Runaway and Homeless Youth Legislation

October 14, 2021

My name is Jayne Bigelsen, and I am the Vice President of Advocacy at Covenant House New York (CHNY), where we serve runaway and homeless youth (RHY) ages 16 to 24. I would like to thank Chair Rose and the entire Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify today.

CHNY is the nation's largest, non-profit adolescent care agency serving homeless, runaway and trafficked youth. During this past year, CHNY served over 1,600 young people in our residential programs, as well as through our drop-in center and outreach efforts. On a nightly basis, we provide shelter to approximately 300 young people, including, LGBTQ youth and pregnant women and mothers with their children as well as survivors of human trafficking/commercial sexual exploitation. Our youth are primarily people of color and over a third of our youth have spent time in the foster care system. We provide young people with food, shelter, clothing, medical care, mental health and substance abuse services, legal services, high school equivalency classes and other educational and job-training programs. All of these services help young people overcome the trauma of abuse, homelessness and exploitation and move toward stability with the goal that their homelessness will not dictate a future path of powerlessness. Rather, our services, programming and staff motivate and inspire youth to find their place in society and to thrive within it.

Length of Stay/Local Law 87

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Overall, CHNY would like to express our gratitude to the NY City Council, and the Youth Services Committee in particular, for the passage of five bills in 2018 that enabled us to better serve young people experiencing homelessness in our city. In particular, Local Law 87 which extended the period of time that youth may stay in RHY shelters, has been especially beneficial for our young people. Many of the young people at CHNY, like many RHY, cycle in and out of programs while they struggle with the dual crises of homelessness and poverty, which leaves our average length of stay well below the new law. However, for many other young people experiencing homelessness, the length of stay of 30 to 60 days under previous law was simply not enough time to take care of their basic needs and embark on a more stable future. The essential task of obtaining identification that is crucial to stability would alone often take more than 60 days. Assessing and stabilizing mental health and determining long term goals and plans can take even longer. In the past year, 188 CHNY youth stayed with us for over 60 days. Prior to the passage of Local Law 87, these young people may have had to leave CHNY before they were ready, thereby placing an unnecessary obstacle in their pathway out of homelessness.

The only drawback we have seen with the passage of Local Law 87 concerns the small, but not insignificant number of young people who due to extreme medical and/or mental health needs, are not best served in the RHY continuum of care. At CHNY, we are fortunate to have twelve social workers, a part-time psychiatrist and a mental health day program, as well as on-site federally funded health clinic so we are well adept to serve a broad range of mental health issues. However, in recent years we have seen an increase in young people with schizophrenia, psychosis and active suicidality-as well as those with severe medical conditions, including chronic heart and kidney conditions. Young people with these conditions often need more medical or mental health support than an RHY program can provide. In fact, regulations



propagated by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS,) who oversees RHY programs across New York State, declare that programs should not accept or retain youth who are in need of a level of medical or mental health needs that cannot be reasonably provided through the resources available to the program. Yet despite this regulation, there are no dedicated residential mental health programs for this age range in NYC. In cases of extreme mental health care, we will advocate to hospitalize the young person in order to ensure their safety. However, frequently the hospital will only keep the youth for 24 hours before returning them to our care. The young person is then bounced back and forth between RHY service providers and hospitals and does not receive the intensive 24/7 mental health care that it is essential to their recovery. Due to the longer length of stay, young people with no appropriate placements to transfer are remaining in RHY programs for longer than they should. New York City desperately needs at least two programs especially dedicated to serving RHY with mental and behavioral health needs that would include on-site clinical services and intensive case management to provide these youth with the services crucial to their mental wellbeing and recovery.

RHY: Age extended through 24/Local Law 88

We are also especially grateful for Local Law 88 which increased the upper age limit for youth to access RHY programs from under 21 to under 25. With advances in science demonstrating that the human brain is not fully developed until age 26, it is essential that older youth have access to developmentally appropriate shelter, something that they can often not find in the adult homeless shelter system. In the past, it was heart breaking when programs had to discharge youth to the adult system as a response to a 21st birthday. Passage of Local Law 88 enabled CHNY to proudly open our new Bridge House for 20 female identified youth between the ages of 21-25, allowing these young adults to live in a beautiful home with



staff dedicated to their unique needs. Since the opening of our Bridge House, we are often at full capacity and have seen firsthand how the specialized training in positive youth development principles, human trafficking, intimate partner violence, motivational interviewing and many other trainings that all CHNY staff receive is equally important with older youth. Seven months after the opening of our Bridge House, it is abundantly clear that raising the age of RHY was a necessary and important move to ending youth homelessness. However, there are currently only 60 beds in the RHY system for this age group. 60 beds only barely scratch the surface of the true need for this age group, and we urge the city to put more funding and resources toward this population without reducing any funding for younger youth experiencing homelessness.

Data/Records

CHNY applauds the City Council and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) for improving efforts to track young people experiencing homelessness and their ability to obtain developmentally appropriate shelter and services. Appropriate data is essential to ensuring that NYC has adequate resources to address the needs of all who are experiencing homelessness. However, we have noticed a few flaws in the data collection system that result in an undercount of youth who are unable to obtain a bed.

Unfortunately, there is currently no way to place a bed 'on hold,' for any reason. For example, beds for a mom and baby count as two beds. If a pregnant youth is in one of those beds with the baby bed empty until the mother delivers, the baby's bed is considered open. The same is true for beds that are taken offline or placed in quarantine areas for the physical distancing needs demanded by the current Covid 19 pandemic. Additionally, if a program needs to keep a bed 'offline' for one day after a youth leaves to clean it and ensure



it is ready for the next youth, the bed will be considered 'open' while it is being prepared for the next youth. The system will also denote an open bed if a program is holding a bed for a youth scheduled to arrive the following day, which may happen when we are holding beds on request of law enforcement for survivors of trafficking or lawyers with youth clients leaving detention. All of these examples demonstrate how the data may erroneously display beds as being open which negates the experience of youth who are turned away and undercuts the true need for beds and funding.

We ask that there be a mechanism in which beds can be placed 'on hold' for all of the above-mentioned scenarios. We again thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for all the committee and its members have done on behalf of young people experiencing homelessness in New York City.



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Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society
on
**Oversight Hearing on the 2018 Runaway and Homeless Youth Legislation:
Reporting and Implementation Follow-up**

submitted to

The New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Deborah Rose, Chair

Submitted by

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Hearing date: October 14, 2021
Testimony submitted: October 16, 2021

Justice in Every Borough.

Introduction

We submit this testimony on behalf of The Legal Aid Society and thank Chair Rose and all of the committee members for inviting our input on the implementation of the 2018 Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Legislation. We also extend our gratitude to Speaker Johnson who led the introduction and passage of this slate of bills in 2018. We thank the Committee for its continued oversight of these important pieces of legislation and look forward to the valuable contributions that we are sure the Committee will make to ensure these laws are fully implemented and are able to serve our City's youth and young adults as intended.

In 2018, New York City expanded the services available to youth who had become homeless and implemented new reporting requirements for the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Extending the age limit for service eligibility and the period of time youth may remain in RHY shelters significantly changed the reach of RHY programs and provided thousands of young adults access to youth-focused, life-saving services. Nonetheless, we would like to share some concerns regarding the implementation of Local Law 88's extension of services to young adults, Local Law 86's Capacity Plan, and the accuracy of the DYCD reports required by Local Law 79. We will also address Local Law 4 of 2019, which provides for information pertaining to immigration issues to be given to RHY.

Local Law 88 of 2018

In 2018, the New York City Council passed Local Law 88, which required DYCD to expand shelter services to homeless young adults ages 21 through 24.¹ While the law did not mandate DYCD to serve all young adults, the number of shelter beds DYCD has made available to 21-24-year-old New Yorkers is patently inadequate. Currently, the department contracts with four service providers to provide a total of 60 shelter beds for this population, which does not address the pressing need. According to one DYCD provider's website "[f]or young people between the ages of 21-24, the wait can be as long as six months" for a bed in a RHY shelter.² As a result, many young adults seek shelter in the Department of Homeless Services (DHS); in 2018 DHS temporarily housed 8,816 21-24-year-olds.³ Additionally, the need for additional youth-specific beds for this population has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in keeping with increased demand for all shelters across the City.

Local Law 88 expanded services to this age group because the Council understood that many 21-24-year-olds feel safer in youth shelters, as opposed to those operated by DHS. Additionally, and as we explained in our testimony in support of this bill in 2018, expanding DYCD services to include young adults is in line with brain development research and honors the nuanced needs of the different populations. Youth shelters were created specifically for young people and are better suited to meet a their needs, especially for RHY who identify as LGBTQI or who need

¹ New York City Council, Local Law 88 of 2018 (enacted Apr. 7, 2018), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3337813&GUID=59621C3D-2453-4B95-9C04-DC32525DD602&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=556>.

² Ali Forney Center, Programs & Services, Emergency Housing Program, available at <https://www.aliforneycenter.org/housing-services>.

³ Report of the New York City Youth Homelessness Task Force, available at Report of the New York City Youth Homelessness Task Force, page 6, available at http://youthtoday.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/09/Report-of-NYC-Youth-Homelessness-Taskforce_January-20191.pdf.

mental health services. Our work with our clients continues to support these conclusions. Simply put, more youth shelter space must be created to serve 21-24-year-olds in the DYCD continuum.

The Capacity Plan under Local Law 86 of 2018

The final section of Local Law 86 mandated DYCD to develop a plan that would enable the City to provide youth specific shelter services to all runaway or homeless youth who request such shelter from the agency or its contracted youth shelter providers. Despite the Council's call for a plan that would provide youth specific shelter to all homeless young people seeking it, however, on October 1, 2018, DYCD produced a plan that relies upon diverting homeless youth ages 18 and older to the adult shelter system.

While Local Law 86 requires DYCD to provide “[a] description of the public resources available to serve runaway and homeless youth including any new services established,” this is separate from the requirement to create a Capacity Plan for the agency to serve RHY.⁴ As Jeffrey Baker, the Legislative Director of this Council, noted in his letter to DYCD in April 2019, “Local Law 86 of 2018 requires that DYCD develop and submit a plan to provide shelter services to all RHY who request such shelter from DYCD.”⁵ Importantly, Mr. Baker reiterated that “[t]he law does not provide for DYCD to use other city agencies’ resources.”⁶

DYCD's response to the Council's Legislative Director was troubling. It did not acknowledge the Department's failure to adhere to the law. Instead, DYCD responded that “for a young person who requests services from DYCD, our providers will seek the best available resource, including within DHS, ACS, HRA and DSS.”⁷ Since this exchange, DYCD has yet to produce a Capacity Plan that meets the requirements of Local Law 86. We do not question DYCD's contention that “[t]he City is more coordinated than ever before to meet the needs of vulnerable youth.”⁸ We question whether this coordination is adequate. We submit that in passing Local Law 86 and requiring that DYCD develop a Capacity Plan, the Council expressed a belief that more had to be done.

The Council, through the passage of Local Law 86, wanted DYCD to create a blueprint to provide a range of services and become the best available resource for young New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We supported the passage of Local Law 86 because it was an acknowledgment that DYCD is best suited to provide youth shelter and services for young people. Although DYCD contends other agencies may have services that might be currently available for young people aged 18 and older, our clients reiterate that they prefer to work with youth shelter service providers, and we know that outcomes are better for individuals who receive supports from youth shelter and service providers.⁹ When this local law was passed, our

⁴ New York City Council, Local Law 86 of 2018, (enacted Apr. 7, 2018), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3337815&GUID=20F8E716-81CF-4FAC-B8E6-CD5661A43FFE&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=1700>.

⁵ Letter from Jeffrey Baker, Legis. Dir., New York City Council, to Bill Chong, Commissioner, Dept. of Youth and Cmty. Dev (Apr. 18, 2019) (on file with author).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Dept. of Youth and Cmty. Dev., to Jeffrey Baker, Legis. Dir., New York City Council (on file with author).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See e.g. Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Cleland, C. M., Ritchie, A.S., Leonard, N.R., Hughes, C., Powlovich, J., & Schoenberg, J. (2017). Moving from crisis to independence: The characteristics, quality, and impact of specialized

hope was that DYCD would create a Capacity Plan that reflected the documented need for bed or service capacity based on our clients' demand, and set forth steps regarding how those demands could be met. The creation of a Capacity Plan contemplates a future where our client's needs and preferences align with DYCD's assessment of what is appropriate. This future has been delayed for long enough and we ask the Council to help encourage DYCD to fulfill the intended goals and express language of Local Law 86's Capacity Plan.

Reporting Requirements of Local Law 79

Local Law 79 requires DYCD to track the number of young people who are turned away from DYCD shelter.¹⁰ In DYCD's two most recent Local Law 79 RHY Service Access reports, which tracked "turnaways" from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, the Department states that of the 2,704 young people who were placed in crisis services or transitional independent living support programs during this period: "no young person who sought a residential program was reported to have been declined a service referral; nor was any youth unable to be matched to a preferred provider."¹¹ This statement is not true and is a reflection of how inadequate DYCD's current tracking system for Local Law 79 is.

Currently, DYCD places the burden of tracking young people who have been turned away from shelter on the program or individual trying to assist the young person to find a placement. DYCD asks them to report when a youth has been turned away because there are no beds available. This is problematic for a number of reasons.

First, there is no way for an advocacy organization, such as The Legal Aid Society (LAS), or any other non-DYCD-funded entity to track when they are working with a young person who is being turned away. Just last week LAS was working with a client who was repeatedly turned away from a number of agencies before a provider was found that had a bed available. This could not be recorded, however, because no mechanism exists for LAS to report the information to DYCD. We know of other legal service organizations and non-profits that have the same experience. We also believe that other shelter systems, such as DHS, may not have the ability to report difficulty referring a young person to a youth shelter bed.

Based on conversations we have had with youth shelter and service providers; we know that many providers do not report instances when youth are turned away. Much of that has to do with the kind of report that must be filled out and the timing of it; it is often required to be completed,

settings for runaway and homeless youth. New York: Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing.

¹⁰ New York City Council, Local Law 79 of 2018, (enacted Apr. 7, 2018), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3050426&GUID=6F2D904D-C629-4F16-BACD-F3056BA3F5E4&Options=ID|Text|&Search=079>.

¹¹ NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, LOCAL LAW 79 RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH (RHY) SERVICE ACCESS REPORT JULY 1, 2020 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020 SUMMARY TO THE NYC COUNCIL (2020), available at https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local_Law79_Shelter_Access_Report_July1-December31-2020.pdf; NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, LOCAL LAW 79 RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH (RHY) SERVICE ACCESS REPORT JANUARY 1, 2021 TO JUNE 30, 2021 SUMMARY TO THE NYC COUNCIL (2021), available at https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local_Law_79_Runaway_and_Homeless_Youth_ShelterAccess_Jan-to-June_2021_072021.pdf.

and sometimes multiple times, at the same time that the staff member is trying to locate a bed for a young person. DYCD's reliance on a small number of organizations to report these instances is a preventable mistake that we asked this Council to alleviate when we testified about this bill prior to its passage, and it must change.¹² DYCD must create a procedure where the agency, as opposed to third parties, is in the position to track when a youth or young adult is turned away from a shelter.

Accurate reporting about young New Yorkers and their access to services is essential to understanding how to best serve the RHY of New York City. At the outset, a reporting requirement that promotes accountability and transparency amongst the City, its agencies, and local community stakeholders will allow for greater collaboration amongst partners. But even more importantly, an accurate report provides an understanding to all stakeholders as to what young homeless New Yorkers need. Knowledge of what services are at capacity and turning young people away will allow the City to dedicate resources to the groups of young New Yorkers who are not being readily served by the RHY system. As it stands, the City, and most notably DYCD, is unable to comprehend the scope of the unhoused crisis facing the youth and young adults of New York City, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, because the current runaway reporting system is designed to receive input from only a small number of the possible people and organizations that help connect young people with services. As such, the system is able to capture only a fraction of the young people who are unable to access services.

Local Law 4 of 2019

Local Law 4 required DYCD to create a plan to support young people who use DYCD-funded services by providing critical information pertaining to immigration supports and benefits.¹³ As we testified in 2018, “providing RHY with access to immigration benefits can be life-changing, opening doors to education, full employment and other opportunities to some of our city’s most vulnerable young people.”¹⁴ However, it remains critical that young immigrants are connected to competent legal service organizations who can work with them to ensure these same vulnerabilities are not exploited or cause worse outcomes.¹⁵ The Legal Aid Society would support any effort to fund and thereby expand the availability of legal advocates on site at various RHY provider agencies so young people in need of advice will be able to do so in the

¹² *Preconsidered Introductions: In relation to runaway and homeless youth services for homeless young adults, In relation to time frames and homeless youth shelter services, and In relation to shelter for runaway and homeless youth: Before The New York City Council Committee on Youth Services*, 6 (2018) (statement of Beth Hofmeister, Staff Attorney, The Legal Aid Society, and Giselle Routhier, Policy Director, Coalition for the Homeless) (“[T]he bill language should be clear that DYCD is tasked with providing the required reports, rather than the providers.”), available at https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RHY_Testimony_02132018.pdf.

¹³ New York City Council, Local Law 4 of 2019, (enacted Jan. 2, 2019), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3343813&GUID=B8AE7E42-45EC-4523-AEBD-514C893B3C42&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=4>.

¹⁴ *Preconsidered Introductions: In relation to requiring the department of youth and community development to review strategies and create a plan of action to protect children who qualify for special immigrant juvenile status: Before The New York City Council Committees on Youth Services and Immigration*, 4 (2018) (statement of Beth Hofmeister, Theresa Moser and Beth Krause, The Legal Aid Society, available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3343813&GUID=B8AE7E42-45EC-4523-AEBD-514C893B3C42&Options=Advanced&Search=>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

same location they receive their other services and supports. Providing information is an important step, but the support to RHY could be even greater moving forward and we encourage DYCD and the City to consider this additional advocacy support.

Conclusion

We again thank the Youth Services Committee for its continued oversight of this important set of legislation. It is clear that the 2018 RHY Local Laws have made a positive impact on youth experiencing homelessness in New York City. However, the full promise of these laws has yet to be realized. We encourage the City and DYCD to take steps to increase the number of beds available to 21-24-year-olds, develop a Capacity Plan that truly adheres to the requirements of Local Law 86, and reform the runaway reporting structure to fully account for the number of youth who are turned away from crisis services or transitional independent living support programs. These steps are premised on the recognition that young people experiencing homelessness have better outcomes when they are provided with shelter and services designed to meet the needs of young people. If adopted, these steps will ensure that the City, its agencies and its community partners will have accurate and transparent data about the need for shelter among young people experiencing homelessness, which DYCD can use to develop and expand its capacity planning to envision and create a continuum where all youth and young adults have access to DYCD programs that meet their needs. We look forward to working with the larger RHY community and the Council on this and related advocacy going forward.

About 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. This dedication to justice for all New Yorkers continues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 2,000 attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

The Society's legal program operates three major 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. Our Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear before the New York City

Family Court in abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare.

Last year, our Juvenile Rights staff represented more than 34,000 children. At the same time, our Criminal Practice handled nearly 220,000 cases for clients accused of criminal conduct. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court are school-age teenagers and young adults. Annually, our Civil Practice works on more than 52,500 individual legal matters, including advocacy for families with school-age children.

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, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits more than 1.7 million low-income families and individuals in New York, and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to homeless New Yorkers. 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. Legal Aid, in collaboration with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLC, filed *C.W. v. The City of New York*, a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of runaway and homeless youth in New York City. The Society, along with institutional plaintiffs Coalition for the Homeless and Center for Independence of the Disabled – NY, settled *Butler v. City of New York* on behalf of all disabled New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Legal Aid has continued to litigate on behalf of thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, including in *E.G.*, where we ensured WiFi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well *Fisher* and *Butler*, where we continue to litigate to protect the rights of individuals living in de-densification hotels during the pandemic.

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