**The Urgent Needs of Homeless Youth**

*One young woman described being raped by a man who took her in of the streets when she was 14. After describing a lifetime of abuse and neglect that led to her homelessness, she summed up her experiences with rape by saying, “When you live a risky lifestyle like that, shit going to happen.” Her experiences of being excluded from her family for her sexuality, her resultant homelessness, and her experience of abuse left her incredibly vulnerable to a pimp, who sexually*

*and physically abused her.[[1]](#endnote-2)*

In 2016, around 31,862 homeless youth were between the ages of 18 and 24 and 3,824 people were under the age of 18.[[2]](#endnote-3) When a youth hits 18, they are no longer eligible for foster care, and many shelters only accept adults who are at least 21. Each year, an estimated 20,000 young people "age out" of the U.S. foster care system.[[3]](#endnote-4) Thousands more flee their homes because of physical or sexual abuse by biological family members or foster families, or leave due to persecution because they identify as LGBTQ. The US does not have systemic support in place secure the economic and social rights of our homeless youth population, and we fail to meet their human rights to housing. Homeless and with little support, this population is extremely vulnerable to human trafficking.

In 2016, the National Human Trafficking Hotline received 7, 572 reported cases of human trafficking, and of those cases, 2,297 of those were regarding minors.[[4]](#endnote-5) The National Human Trafficking hotline lists being a Runaway/Homeless Youth as the number three risk factor for becoming a victim of human trafficking with 346 cases directly related to this last year.[[5]](#endnote-6) In a survey of 641 homeless youth, 91% of participants said strangers or acquaintances offered them well-paid work opportunities that turned out to be fraudulent work, scams, pandering, or sex trafficking.[[6]](#endnote-7)For youth with a high economic need and no previous work experience, a lucrative offer from someone willing to help you off the street can be enticing. Options like this have led to about 19% of homeless youth being victim to at least one form of human trafficking.[[7]](#endnote-8) Homeless youth are at particularly high risk because of their financial needs, lack of shelter/privacy, lack of support system, and potential history of sexual abuse.

In a study of 300 homeless youth, of trafficking victims, 95% of sex-trafficked youth reported a history of child maltreatment, and 49% reported sexual abuse.[[8]](#endnote-9) 41% identified as being in the welfare system at one point through a placement in foster care.[[9]](#endnote-10) Our system did not successfully identify and support this population while they were in the welfare system. Now the US has the opportunity to provide some systemic provisions for homeless youth trafficking victims so that victims can restore their human rights.

Congress has failed to pass the Runaway Homeless Youth Trafficking Prevent Act (RHYTPA) since 2013. The RHYTPA allows victims the access to trauma-informed care, extends a stay in shelters up to 30 days, and provides homeless youth with age, gender, culturally and linguistically appropriate life skills training, education, and employment support. All of these services are necessary for victims so that they can move towards recovery, get a job and secure stable housing.

Senate Bill 554, Safe Harbor for Exploited Children introduced in March 2017, would provide specialized services to help minor victims of trafficking gain their dignity and autonomy, and safe harbor for minors who have committed crimes while being subject to sex trafficking. It is imperative that sexually exploited children are immune from prosecution and may not be jailed, fined or charged for actions committed while a victim of sexual exploitation. This is a necessary statewide protocol to end the cycle of poverty and homelessness for youth victims.

**Our Recommendations:**

* Call upon the US Senate and House of Representatives to urgently pass and fully fund the Runaway Homeless Youth Trafficking Prevention Act until 2020.
* Ask government officials how cities have been providing services for homeless youth who are at risk for being trafficked or are current victims of human trafficking since the 2013 expiration of Runaway Homeless Youth Trafficking Prevent Act.
* Call upon Senate to pass Senate Bill 554 Safe Harbor for Exploited Children.
* Follow up on and reiterate theUN Special Rapporteur Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children on trafficking 2016 visit recommendations:
  1. “Provide individualised services, including long and short term housing to all trafficked persons, including children and men;
  2. Fulfill the obligations as stated in the ratified Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. Within the convention, it states that those who ratify the convention will ‘take effective and time-bound measures to…identify and reach out to children at special risk’[[10]](#endnote-11)
  3. Ensure the systematic implementation of the non–punishment principle so that trafficked persons are not prosecuted for offenses they are involved in as a direct result of their situation as trafficked person;
  4. Unconditionally protect and support all victims of trafficking, including child victims, LGBTI, native Americans, victims of labour trafficking and domestic servitude with full respect for their human rights.”[[11]](#endnote-12)

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter.

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1. Bolden, Christian, Taylor, Rae, and Murphy, Laura. (2015) *Trafficking and Exploitative Labor Among Homeless Youth in New Orleans.* Page 26.Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5887a2a61b631bfbbc1ad83a/t/59498effe4fcb553cd3bd5cc/1497992978429/HomelessYouthNewOrleans.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Covenant House. *Homelessness in America; The Homeless Crisis.* Available at: https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/homeless-children-in-america [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Covenant House. *Homelessness in America; Many Kids Move from Foster Care to Homelessness as They Turn 18.* Available at:

   https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-teen-issues/foster-care [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Polaris Project. *National Human Trafficking Hotline 2016 Statistics.* (January 2017). Available at https://polarisproject.org/resources/2016-hotline-statistics [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. *Id.* [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Murphy, Laura. (2016). *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study, Executive Summary.* Page 4. Available at: https://covenanthousestudy.org/landing/trafficking/docs/Loyola-Research-Results.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. *Id.* [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research. *Field Center Completes Multi-City Study on Child Trafficking Among Homeless Youth; Identifies Risk and Resilience Factors.* Available at: https://covenanthousestudy.org/landing/trafficking/docs/Penn-Research-Results.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. *Id.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. International Labour Organization (ILO), Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 17 June 1999, C182. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Grazia Giammarinaro, Maria. (June 7th, 2017). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children on her mission to the United States of America.* Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Trafficking/Pages/visits.aspx [↑](#endnote-ref-12)