



HB 6666 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH STATUTES

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Mailing Address
65 Elizabeth Street
Hartford, CT 06105

2074 Park Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860-570-5327

211 State Street
Bridgeport, CT 06604
203-335-0719

CCA at Yale New Haven Hospital
203-688-0113

CCA at CT Children's Medical Center
860-545-8581

cca-ct.org

Public Health Committee

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide private, non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic legal representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am the Director of the Right Direction: Homeless Youth Advocacy Project, which provides legal services to youth throughout the state. Additionally, I chair the Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Taskgroup of the Reaching Home Campaign, the campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. More information about the work to ensure youth homelessness is rare, brief and one-time can be found here: <https://pschousing.org/reaching-home-youth-and-young-adult-homelessness-initiatives>.

I write today to support sections 70-72 of HB 6666 which allows youth age twenty-four or younger who are experiencing homelessness to access a fee waiver for a State identity card or a birth certificate. These documents are critical to youths' ability to access employment, housing and services to get out- and stay out- of homelessness.

Currently, the law allows the commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles to waive the fee for individuals who are residents of a homeless shelter or other facility for homeless persons. See CGS § 1-1h(a)(D). However, many youth experiencing homelessness do not stay in shelters or facilities and therefore are not eligible for the existing fee waiver for State ID's. There is no fee waiver for birth certificates.

Youth experiencing homelessness are often moving from place to place, or from couch to couch, on a regular basis. Many are also in unsafe situations in order to have a place to stay. The way out of these unsafe situations is for youth to have immediate access to a birth certificate and State ID. Having these is critical to accessing employment, housing, Job Corps, and financial benefits.

The State has already determined that access to a State issued identity card is critical for homeless individuals. This language will specifically ensure that *youth* experiencing homelessness get that same access afforded those who are staying in shelters.

The language in this bill aligns with the definition of homelessness in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which is already embedded in CT statutes. The McKinney-Vento definition is used in our education statutes as well as the statute allowing homeless minors to access a birth certificate without parent/guardian permission.¹

States such Florida, Maryland, Illinois, California and Indiana all define eligibility for a fee waiver for youth experiencing homelessness consistent with the McKinney-Vento definition in order to access State ID's.¹ Additionally, states including Maryland, Texas, Kentucky, Nevada, Utah, California, and Indiana, provide a fee waiver for youth experiencing homelessness, consistent with the federal McKinney-Vento definition, to access a birth certificate.²

These youth are vulnerable. They need *immediate* services when experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Findings from the 2020 Youth Outreach & Count tell us that more than 7,800 youth were estimated to be experiencing homelessness or serious housing instability. Of those, 2,462 were estimated to be what's called, "literally homeless," meaning staying on the streets, in shelter, or in a place not meant for human habitation.³ We also know that people of color and LGBTQ youth are over-represented in youth homelessness.⁴

Furthermore, more than 50% of these youth did not have a high school diploma, more than 50% were not employed and there is a high level of criminal justice and child welfare involvement among this population.⁵

The data is echoed in the voices of the youth who call us on a regular basis saying they are staying on friends' couches, are sleeping in hallways, and are in need of help. Many of these youth have submitted testimony for you here today. Reyna, Nathaniel, Vincent and their peers have all experienced homelessness. In their testimony, you see the trauma of their experiences and the resiliency of their spirits. Passing this bill is one step we can take to open the doors for them.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacey Violante Cote

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Director, Homeless Youth Advocacy Project

¹ See FSA § 743.067; Cal Vehicle Code § 14902; 15 ILCS 335/4C; IN ST 31-36-3-4, COMAR 11.17.21.05.

² See MD Health Gen §4-217; TX Health & Safety §191.0049; KY ST §213.141; NV ST §440.700; Utah Code Ann §26-2-12.6; Cal Health & Safety Code §103577; IN ST §31-36-3-4.

³ CT Coalition to End Homelessness, "2020 Youth Outreach and Count Report," available at: <https://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Youth-Count-FINAL.pdf> .

⁴ 31% were Black/African American, 31.6% were Hispanic/Latino and nearly 1 out of 5 respondents struggling with housing were LGBTQ+. Id at 15, 17, 18.

⁵ CT Coalition to End Homelessness, "2020 Youth Outreach and Count Report," available at: <https://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Youth-Count-FINAL.pdf> .