

Opening Remarks

Chairwoman Carolyn McCarthy Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities Committee on Education and Labor

“Runway, Homeless, and Missing Children: Perspectives on Helping the Nation’s Vulnerable Youth”

I am pleased to welcome you to the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities hearing on runaway, homeless, and missing children.

I would like to thank the Ranking Member, Mr. Platts for his interest in this important hearing.

I would also like to thank my two colleagues on the Healthy Families Subcommittee, Mr. Grijalva and Mr. Yarmuth for the dedication to issues of runaway and homeless children.

Mr. Grijalva has taken the lead and urged the appropriations to increase funds for runaway and homeless youth programs, with success this year.

Mr. Yarmuth recently held a town hall to illuminate the issues of runaway and homeless youth in his district in Kentucky.

We are lucky to have such passionate members on this subcommittee, and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses from your districts today.

I would like to welcome a visitor to our hearing today, Mr. Lampson from Texas. We are glad that you could join us today. Mr. Lampson has been personally dedicated to this issue for the last ten years. He founded the Congressional Missing and Exploited Children Caucus, which now has over 130 members. Mr. Lampson remains the champion of missing and exploited children in Congress.

We are here today to learn about runaway, homeless, and missing children, and gain perspectives on how we can help these young people as we begin the reauthorization process.

Although there are no exact figures for the number of runaway and homeless youth in our nation, in 2002, 1.6 million young people between the ages of 12 to 17 ran away from home and slept in exposed or poorly sheltered locations.

Runaways may find shelter with a friend or member of the community, but for the children who find themselves on the street, food, shelter, healthcare, and personal safety needs are not met. Studies of runaway and homeless youth show high rates of emotional and mental health problems. According to the Basic Center Program and Transitional Living Program in 2006, 29 per cent were identified as having mental health issues upon exiting care.

In addition, many of the young people who enter shelters have a history with the Juvenile Justice system, on which we had a hearing a week and a half ago. These issues are all related, as we have a juvenile correction system that fails to protect youth from shelters and streets.

Runaway children may fall into the missing children category.

A study funded by the Department of Justice found that nearly all of the 1.3 million children who went missing in 1999 were reunited with their caretakers.

We will learn of the grassroots activity on these issues, which includes collaboration between those who assist runaway and homeless youth and those who locate missing children. However, not every child was reunited with caretakers, and that is why we have AMBER alerts, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a task force on internet crimes against children, and law enforcement training center.

Today's topics are difficult. I am looking forward to learning what we do for our runaway, homeless, and missing children, and recommendations on what we can do through reauthorization, to better serve these young people.