

March 22, 2020

Contact:

Redmond Haskins  
The Legal Aid Society  
929-441-2384  
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

***Joint Statement Calling for Immediate Increased Financial Support and Guidance for Runaway and Homeless Youth and Service Providers***

***Staff Providing Runaway and Homeless Youth Services Must Be Given All Available Resources of Essential Workers In Order to Prevent An Indefinite Interruption in Services***

(New York, NY) - As the spread and impact of COVID-19 continues to disrupt normal life for all New Yorkers, the thousands of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) living in youth shelters, doubled-up with friends and neighbors, and sleeping on the street are left without rapidly disappearing access to life-sustaining services at youth residential programs and drop-in centers. In the seven days since Mayor de Blasio declared a State of Emergency in the City of New York, there has been little to no guidance or help provided to programs that provide life-sustaining support to youth experiencing homelessness in the City, including how young people will be able to access technology to continue their education for the coming weeks.

Each day brings additional restrictions in hours and services to this population as RHY service providers are left without the tools or financial assistance to continue safely providing services to those who need them. Governor Cuomo's Executive Order to mandate that all non-essential workers must work from home could completely eliminate the entire runaway and homeless youth system absent immediate guidance from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) about how programs should proceed after Sunday. Our City and State governments have routinely forgotten or ignored this particular vulnerable part of our community and we demand that immediate action be taken to ensure that all homeless young people can continue accessing ~~the~~ what they need to survive as safely as possible.

“As class counsel on *C.W. v. The City of New York*, The Legal Aid Society is appalled that on the heels of a settlement to our lawsuit we would be in the position of watching these residential, drop-in, and other support services so desperately needed by our clients begin to disappear before our eyes in the face of an emergency. We will continue to push our local and state governments to sustain these necessary program by providing the guidance and support needed to operate them safely and creative in the face of the pandemic, including giving RHY providers all of the resources of other essential workers,” said **Beth Hofmeister, Staff Attorney, Homeless Rights Project.**

“A week after the Mayor issued a state of emergency in NYC, the Department of Youth and Community Development has still not issued adequate guidance to the RHY programs about how to keep their staff and the youth they serve safe. Their complete negligence of the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and their contracted providers regarding the COVID-19 pandemic is dangerous and exemplary of the agencies consistent lack of attention to the needs of this vulnerable population whom it is their responsibility to serve,” said **Jamie Powlovich, Executive Director, Coalition for Homeless Youth.**

New York City must immediately issue guidance to RHY providers about their essential worker status and provide clear and direct guidance about how and where young people experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 will be able to shelter themselves, within the continuum of DYCD programs or otherwise, as well as obtain the other services and support they need beyond that time is imperative. Moreover, working creatively with providers to assess and adjust how services could be provided, including remote access to counseling and case management, are opportunities to continue to service runaway and homeless youth people in the uncertain months to come.

###