

Representative Jonathan Singer, Chair
Representative Dafna Michaelson Jenet, Vice Chair
Committee on Public Health Care & Human Services

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Support for SB20-106

My name is Kaitlin Stecklein, I am a master's student in the International Disaster Psychology Program at DU. I am testifying in strong support of SB20-106: consent to Shelter and Services by Homeless Youth which allows homeless youth 15 and over to gain access to shelter without the permission of a parent/guardian. This bill would allow homeless youth to access the care and shelter that they need, when they need it.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, during the 2017-2018 school year, an estimated 22,369 public students experienced homelessness. Within this number, 931 students were unsheltered. This bill would allow Colorado to provide shelter to some of these 931 students, allowing them a better chance to succeed. There are many causes of youth homelessness, including but not limited to: parents asking them to leave, parents' substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and family poverty. In addition, approximately 46% of homeless youth are dealing with abuse.

By allowing homeless youth 15 years and older to consent to shelter, we can hopefully get them into shelters that are safer than sleeping on the streets, couches of friends and acquaintances, or in the homes of adults who have abused them. Many youths are forced to trade sex for food, clothing, and shelter in order to survive. This leads to higher risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. Homeless youth also have higher rates of anxiety, depression poor health and nutrition, and low self-esteem. Some of these consequences of youth homelessness can be mitigated by providing easier access to shelter.

While it is wonderful that Colorado is one of three states in the US to have an Office for Homeless Youth Services, we can still do more to provide shelter and services to our homeless youth, including passing SB20-106. I strongly urge the passing of this bill, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

