

Good morning Chairman Graham, Councilmember Brown and Committee staff. My name is Maggie Riden and I am here to testify on behalf of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates and to articulate our strong support of Bill 19-87, the Homeless Services Amendment Act of 2011.

The homeless and unstably housed youth population is a unique and vulnerable sub-population of the District's homeless residents. At the same time, homeless youth are also ripe with potential. We know that with age appropriate services, supports and opportunities these young people can mature into successful, self sufficient and contributing community members.

I would like to open my remarks by providing some context on the size and characteristics of the homeless youth population in DC. Between March 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of this year, DCAYA in concert with the ICH, the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy at George Washington University and with the support of over 60 community organizations, interviewed 490 homeless and unstably housed District youth between the ages of 12-24. Of the 490, 330 were actively homeless at the time they completed the survey. Of the remaining 160 respondents, 56% reported having been without a stable place to stay in the preceding two weeks. The data revealed a variety of key insights and in the interest of time I will not discuss them all at this moment, but I do want to highlight a few key findings. Of the literally homeless youth: 81% of respondents were unemployed, 48% were not actively involved in an educational or vocational training program, and 58% (of those over 19) had not obtained a high school diploma or GED and 39% reported involvement with the Child and Family Services Agency or the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services. These statistics tell us that ending homelessness among youth and young adults will require the participation of numerous stakeholders ranging from community providers to DCPS, DYRS, CFSA, DOES and DHS are among just a few.

This reality is what makes the addition of a youth provider to the ICH and the mandate to develop specific strategies and policies for homeless youth critical. The ICH is the venue at which each of the necessary agency and community representatives can convene and coordinate systems and policies to ensure that youth and young adults are receiving the services necessary to become independent and self sufficient. Furthermore, the requirements laid out in this bill have already started to develop. This amendment will simply codify and institutionalize the steps the ICH has already taken with regard to the youth population. In the last year the ICH Strategic Planning Committee has convened a Youth Sub-Committee which I am honored to co-chair with Sue Marshall. The role of this committee has been to both ascertain a better estimate on the size of the homeless youth population, to identify their unique needs and existing service gaps for the youth continuum, and to initiate the development of policies designed to prevent and end youth homelessness.

The formalization of this work will ensure that the unique needs of homeless youth and the services provided to support their transition to successful adulthood are assessed annually and modified as necessary. With these structures in place, DC can make measurable gains in preventing and ending the issue of youth homelessness. Again,

DCAYA strongly endorses this amendment and I am happy to answer any questions related to our survey findings or our support of this amendment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.