

Deborah Shore - Testimony on the Homeless Services Amendment Act

Committee on Human Services - June 16, 2011

Dear Chairman Graham:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Deborah Shore, Executive Director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork, an agency which provides essential support to runaway and homeless youth and young adults.

I am fully in support of this bill and have been since its original inception. This bill will actually bring the District into parity with the direction that the Federal leadership on homeless is going and assure that we are representing all facets of the homelessness population.

Sasha Bruce provides emergency shelter, street outreach and transitional living services to homeless youth who are 18 and under and also provides transitional living services to young adults who are single and who are heading young family's.

The importance of having the voices that are knowledgeable about youth needs on the Interagency Council on Homelessness is to assure that the services as they are conceived for homeless youth and young families are developmentally appropriate and that we are not simply using the adult model as the template for defining success for youth and young adults. As an example, within the adult homeless community as defined by the federal HUD funding, success is the ability to move people to permanent housing. This is appropriate and a truly helpful goal when planning for adult homeless people. But with youth, transitional living services are often the most appropriate place for them to be while they figure out what next steps might be such as college which is a successful step on the way to self-sufficiency but is not "permanent".

To fully engage in these discussions at the ICH is to be sure to include youth and young adult advocates and providers directly as this bill would assure.

I want to share an experience I had recently. I was invited as a youth expert to serve on a panel for the King County ICH as part of an evaluation they were doing about their success at the 5 year point in their 10 year plan. They used a Charette process which is a tightly facilitated community discussion. It was very impressive to me that as part of the lead up to the Charrette, they had identified youth and young adult services as an area where performance and capacity had not reached their goals. They had included youth agencies 5 years ago as part of their ICH and had therefore developed agreed upon goals upon which the system could be evaluated. That is what I believe including youth and young adult focused providers will bring to the ICH with the passage of this bill.

I do want to thank Sue Marshall and the Community Partnership on their support of youth and young adults funding. We have been able to maintain all of our programs during these last years due to that support continuing. For Sasha Bruce, the cutbacks we suffered from CFSA for the emergency shelter program threatened its viability. We have been able to weather the storm but have suffered many personnel cuts to absorb the large gap which the CFSA funding provided as a prevention of youth into public care.

Also, I am so proud of the DCAYA count which will reveal the considerable need that still exists in the District for all sorts of service for runaway and homeless youth. Maggie Riden, the DCAYA leadership and our staff who performed the outreach and were able to get so many youth to participate are to be applauded. This is a first in our city and there are only a few other places in the country that have done such work.

I look forward to the passage of this bill. Thank you for the chance to share my perspective.