

Reinstate 72-Hour Notification for Youth Shelters

The Problem

Since 2010, shelters have had up to 72 hours to notify the parents of unaccompanied minors entering their shelter. The extended notification period has made it possible for shelters to keep youth safe while supporting family reconciliation and reunification. This policy has expired, returning to an eight-hour notification, which can be too short a time for shelters to engage youth and often drives youth away, putting their health and safety at risk.

The Need in 2013

- Shelters need every tool available in order to ensure unaccompanied minors have a safe and stable place to stay in times of crisis.
- Youth and families often need more than eight hours to resolve conflicts and safely reunify.

The Solution

We must permanently reinstate the 72-hour notification for youth shelters to protect youth & families

The Reality for Youth

“Over the past 30 years, I have met with countless parents that, while worried about their children, are comforted by the fact that they are safe in a licensed shelter, and not at risk of falling victim to predators. This policy is pro-parent and encourages healthy conflict-resolution within families.”

-Jim Theofelis, Executive Director, The Mockingbird Society

From June 2011 to July 2012, 88% of youth who visited Community Youth Services were reunited with their families.

- Each year in the U.S., approximately 39,000 youth who are homeless are sexually assaulted or exploited.¹ If youth are afraid of shelters that report, they are at risk of becoming victims of those that prey on that fear, including pimps and predators.
- 57% of youth in the U.S. who are homeless for the first time experience homelessness at least once more, with 15% never exiting homelessness.²

The Benefit of 72-Hour Notification

“Kevin”

“Kevin,” age 13, came to Teen Feed hopeless and alone after a fight with his mother left him homeless for the first time. He initially resisted being referred to a shelter, fearful that it would result in police or Child Protective Services involvement. Once assured that no notification was immediately necessary, Kevin agreed to enter a shelter for the night. He was reunified with his mother the next day.

“Kenny”

“Kenny,” age 17, came to a Friends of Youth shelter following an altercation with his father. Kenny was able to spend two days safely cooling off before opening up to the possibility of reunification. After getting the father’s consent to remain in the shelter, Friends of Youth connected Kenny and his father to counseling services and they were reunified within three weeks.

“Amanda”

“Amanda,” age 16, was in need of shelter when she arrived at Cocoon House. She had not been in contact with her mother in over a year, which made obtaining parental consent problematic. Amanda stayed for 72 hours until Cocoon House Staff were finally able to reach her mother on Amanda’s 17th Birthday, and she was able to celebrate it in safety, knowing that she had a stable place to stay.

Community Support

ACLU of Washington - Auburn Youth Resources - Cocoon House - Columbia Legal Services - Community Youth Services - Friends of Youth - The Mockingbird Society - Partners for Our Children - Safe Harbor - Seattle YMCA - Teen Feed - YouthCare

For questions or comments, please contact:

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¹“Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Homelessness”, National Alliance to End Homelessness, www.endhomelessness.org.

² Milburn, Norweeta, “Family Reunification: Promising Approaches, Promising Outcomes.” National Alliance to End Homelessness. February, 2012.