

SAMPLE
Previous Testimony in Front of DC Council
Youth Homelessness

Ramina Davidson

Director of Housing Stability & Youth Initiatives, The DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
Committee on Human Services Budget Oversight Hearing: Department of Human Services
April 10, 2019

Good morning, Chairperson Nadeau, Councilmembers, and staff. My name is Ramina Davidson, and I am here in my capacity as the Director of Housing Stability & Youth Initiatives at the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor’s proposed budget for the Department of Human Services (“DHS”).

Over the last year, it has been my privilege to co-chair the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness’s (“ICH”) Youth Committee as it works to end youth homelessness in the District. I want to take this moment to thank you, Chairperson and members of the Committee, for securing additional funds to total over \$3.3 million in new funding towards the implementation of Year 2 of Solid Foundations DC: The Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness.

¹ This investment, most of which is being granted out to Community-Based Organizations (“CBOs”), will aid in an increase in services for hundreds of DC youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Notably, in FY19 so far, DHS programs have served almost as many transition age youth without children as in the entirety of FY18.²

Solid Foundations is an Evolving Plan

I also want to thank the Mayor for proposing an increase of almost \$2.5 million for programs and services for DC youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. While I have recommendations for this Committee on investments in the youth homelessness system, I want to take some time to note that as a roadmap for ending youth homelessness, Solid Foundations is an evolving plan. As we continue to learn more about the needs of the youth we serve, and as we learn from the other subsystems and from other communities, we must continuously shift to nimbly create new programs and services and to bring all programs and services to scale effectively. As such, even as we complete Year 2 of Solid Foundations and move into Year 3, the

¹ District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness, *Solid Foundations DC: Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*, May 2017.
https://ich.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ich/page_content/attachments/Solid%20Foundations%20DC%20_web%201.5.pdf

² In FY19 to date 1872 transition age youth without children were served as compared to 1971 in FY18, See Department of Human Services, *Performance Oversight Responses FY18*, Part 1, pg 56-57.

youth homelessness system already looks different from what was planned when Solid Foundations was created. It's different by design.

For example, over the last year, as we noted in performance testimony, DHS worked closely with the community to create Extended Transitional Housing ("ETH"), a brand new program that was not outlined in Solid Foundations. This program "increases the housing and intensive supportive services" to transition age youth "for up to six (6) years...to provide extremely vulnerable youth with intensive support as a way to prevent long-term, chronic homelessness in adulthood."³

At the same time, we have been cautious to scale Rapid ReHousing for Youth with the zeal that the original plan dictates.⁴ Taking in feedback from providers on the vulnerability of the majority of youth we serve as well as the inherent risk of attaining housing that ultimately becomes unaffordable after a subsidy lapses, we simply need more data and time to determine how Rapid ReHousing should look and exactly how much we may need.⁵

As we continue to have these discussions and continue to learn, however, I want to note that the 2018 Youth Census indicates that the number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability has likely remained unchanged or has increased slightly from last year. Through a new survey tool informed directly by youth, community stakeholders, and national experts, the survey captured 211 more youth than last year.⁶ In discussions with The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness and stakeholders, it's likely that a majority of the additional youth counted were youth who simply had not been counted in the past.

Though we are thoughtfully creating new programs and making adjustments to scaling estimates, the need remains unchanged. According to Solid Foundations Year 3 Projections on unit need, if we are to end youth homelessness in three years, we would need to add 287 units of housing and shelter in the FY20 budget alone.⁷

With these notes in mind, and after discussions with youth and the providers that serve them, I make the following recommendations for the FY20 budget for youth homelessness.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Solid Foundations Year 3 Projections for Youth System Inventory show TAY RRH at 264 units--more than any other housing resource, *See* Solid Foundations, DC Table 6, p. 30.

⁵ To this end, the ICH Youth Committee is establishing a workgroup to make recommendations on data and performance measures for programs.

⁶ The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, Youth Count DC presentation at the ICH Youth Committee, February 2019.

⁷ *See* Solid Foundations Year 3 Projections for Youth System Inventory show TAY RRH at 264 units--more than any other housing resource, *See* Solid Foundations, DC Table 6, p. 30. *See also* Department of Human Services, *Performance Oversight Responses FY18*, Part 1.

Prioritize Resources for the Most Vulnerable Youth

As we continue to scale up and develop a variety of services and programs to serve a variety of needs, we must continue to prioritize our most vulnerable youth. Prioritizing services for these youth involves scaling up shelter beds as well as housing programs with intensive supports. As such, for FY20 we recommend a total of 60 new units of Transition Age Youth shelter beds and 50 new units of Permanent Supportive Housing, which will be used to fund ETH.

Youth have prioritized shelter beds as a need, and a deep dive into the 2018 Youth Count Data shows that 25% of the over 700 unaccompanied youth counted were unsheltered for some portion of the time period studied. As unsheltered youth are particularly vulnerable, we must work to provide them with a safe place to sleep.⁸

Further, providers have prioritized the need for more intensive housing supports like ETH due to the number of youth they serve who are grappling with histories of extensive trauma and mental health and substance use issues.

Continue Investments in Tailored Programs

Also, as the system continues to evolve to better meet the needs of youth, we have learned that a one size fits all approach simply doesn't work. Youth enter the system with a variety of needs, and ending youth homelessness requires the ability to meet youth where they are. As such, we recommend a total of 50 new units of Transitional Housing ("TH") for FY20. As we continue to better capture youth needs through collecting information from youth, providers, and through the Youth Count, we are better able to produce innovative programs to meet those needs. New investments in TH for FY20 should be used to address specific needs, such as the needs of LGBTQ youth and of youth fleeing violence.⁹

Cautious Investments in Rapid ReHousing for Youth

On Rapid ReHousing for youth, as noted in my testimony here and previously, we recommend slow and cautious increased investments so that the system can collect and compare data. Currently, DC's youth homelessness system has two providers, one funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") and one funded by DHS. Another locally funded program would be helpful to compare programs, and as such we recommend preserving the Mayor's proposed investment of 30 additional units of Rapid ReHousing. However, we continue to recommend prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable youth.

⁸ See The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, Youth Count DC presentation at the ICH Youth Committee, February 2019.

⁹ See *Id.*

Continued Investments in Innovative Supports for Youth Are Necessary

Finally, we recommend supporting innovative new programs and services to support all the needs of youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability. A need identified by “Through the Eyes of Youth,” the ICH Youth Committee’s youth advisory board is the need for a mentoring program. While youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability must have their basic needs met, including housing and wraparound services, most youth, homeless or not, need a trusted adult to mentor them as they transition to adulthood. As such, we recommend funding for a pilot project to provide mentoring services for youth in DC’s youth homelessness programs.

Altogether, we recommend a total of 190 additional housing units for FY20, almost 100 units less than original Solid Foundations estimates as we continue to thoughtfully scale programs and services. As I’ve noted in previous testimony, every investment in youth homelessness services is doubly invested in our homelessness services system because these youth programs also function as prevention and diversion programs for the adult and family systems. In fact, studies have shown that youth homelessness is the largest entry pathway to adult homelessness, larger than mental health issues, substance use, housing crises, or family breakdown.¹⁰ If we continue to invest in youth homelessness programs, we will not only meet our goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness in DC, we will make necessary and effective strides in our our mission to prevent and end homelessness for all DC residents.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.

¹⁰ See Chamberlain, Chris and Guy Johnson. “Pathways to Adult Homelessness.” *Journal of Sociology* 49(1) November 2011.

Appendix: Breakdown of Recommended Budget Increases:

	FY20 Need	Proposed FY20 Unit Additions	Additional Units Needed	Unit Cost	Recommended Additional Funds
PSH	50	15	35	\$34,236	\$1,198,260
TH	50	23	27	\$42,000	\$1,134,000
TAY Shelter	60	0	60	\$22,000 ¹¹	\$1,320,000
RRH	30	30	0	\$32,500	\$0
Mentoring Pilot					\$250,000 ¹²
Total					<u>\$3,902,260</u>

¹¹ Estimated unit cost based on previous year calculations.

¹² Amount estimated based on the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services credible messengers program.