



**Testimony to Chairman Raymond and the House Human Services Committee for HB 2240**

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I want to thank the Chairman and Committee members for the opportunity to address you again and especially thanks to be able to speak about an important issue on Homeless Awareness Day. I also want to thank Representative Turner and his staff for authoring this bill.

I think homeless youth in Texas clearly deserve to be recognized as homeless when that certification helps them attain the rights they are entitled too and should otherwise be afforded.

I think a study to ascertain how this definition should be granted and how it should best be implemented makes complete sense and we support this bill without reservation. I ran a shelter for homeless youth for 15 years, and often the label placed on them didn't matter. This was a kid, he or she needed a safe place to spend the night, let's find them a bed.

Sometimes it did seem to matter. I have personally taken hundreds of youth to enroll at their first day at a new school. I have seen dozens denied enrollment. I have seen Registrars, Principals, and Chief Legal Counsels, etc. refuse to enroll/admit homeless youths. I have had lawyers tell me that they have made appeals to the Texas Education Agency to enroll a homeless youth when a district refuses to, and at the end of the day, been told that they can't force a superintendent to do what he or she doesn't want to do. In these rare but unfortunate situations the youth is told they can bring civil action if they so choose.

Even if these youth could afford adequate counsel, they don't want to. They just want to go to school. And it is amazing to me to spend time with young people who have been kicked out of homes, communities and other places and they still want to succeed in school. I have seen thousands of actual school days missed due to roadblock, excuse double-speak, bureaucracy, etc.

I am not sure this study will lead to all the answers. I am not sure that our great state legally recognizing this sub-population will solve all the problems they face, but I think we should be looking at this challenge and asking why any of our children should miss one day of school for no good reason. Some folks may feel that educating homeless youth is a hassle. I think that there is ample evidence that not doing so is a much bigger one.

I don't think school enrollment is the only way this designation might help, but it's one of the most important barriers that these guys face. Learning more can't hurt, and I am glad this issue is getting attention.

Thank you.