

**Testimony to Chairman West and the Senate Jurisprudence Committee  
for SB 717**

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I am here to testify in support of SB 717. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For over 14 years, I was the Director of residential programs at Lifeworks (here in Austin) that provide complete care for homeless youth and youth in foster care. I engaged over 5,000 young people during my service for Lifeworks, most of them in the later teen years. In addition to an emergency shelter, I oversaw the operations of two transitional living programs that serve youth who would benefit from this proposed legislation.

I have received questions about why this bill is necessary, when it seems like a young person could resolve the challenges it address by just emancipating themselves. The easiest answer is that you can't "just go and get emancipated." The environment around emancipation varies from judge to judge, city to city. The process can be complex, cumbersome, and expensive, depending on a youth's community. I believe this bill will encourage youth in dangerous or unproductive situations to explore their options, including, but not limited to, emancipation, and make progress toward independent living by saving money or completing educational goals.

One population that could really benefit from this bill is single mothers. Sixteen and 17 year-old moms who have been thrown out of their family home or left behind due to overcrowding or abuse, often time live in the shadows, couch surfing or worse and often exposing their baby to risk. Making it easier for them to obtain services through a transitional living program opens the door to case management services, parenting classes, and more, and reduces the chance that mom or baby will end up in foster care.

I have also had the opportunity to work with many "street dependent" youth. These are youth who often travel, camp, squat and tend to live in the shadows of our community. These youth tend to be very wary of authority and institutions. Giving them choice and control over their situation increases the chance they will accept help, including services. Youth in these situations cannot make a case for emancipation because they usually have no savings or demonstrable income, and no evidence of stability. If passed, this bill will create opportunities for transitional living programs to service as incubators for emancipation and give youth resources and information to make decisions about their future.

Thank you.