

The Plight Of Homeless Youth Now

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Advocates say outdated laws and government funding cuts are making it harder for one of New York's most overlooked populations – homeless young people at risk for sexual exploitation and human trafficking – to get the help they need.

That was the message from the leaders of youth outreach programs who testified today at a hearing convened by [Assemblywoman Amy Paulin](#), a Democrat from Westchester County and the chair of the Committee on Children and Families.

The goal of the hearing was to examine the current system in place to help homeless young people and to discuss how to handle the lack of funding for assistance program.

Under the current budget, \$1.5 million in funding provides homeless children with safe shelter and short-term or long-term housing and guidance.

While these programs are in place and have been proven to work, the recent funding cuts have only led to a decrease in the number of young people that are able to receive the assistance they need.

One such organization that many homeless youth turn to is New York City's [Covenant House](#). The organization is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provides food, clothing, and shelter, along with educational and medical care to roughly 3,000 homeless young people between the ages of 16 and 21 each year.

Jayne Bigelsen, Covenant House's director of anti-trafficking initiatives, said the organization now has to turn away 300 young people a month due to lack of funding.

Bigelsen also said that many of these young people lack the education and job training necessary to hold a legitimate job, which leads many to sell their bodies and dignity in exchange for a place to sleep.

According to a 2007 survey done by the [Empire State Coalition of Youth & Family Services](#), over 3,800 young people in New York City have either run away from their homes or have been kicked out by their families.

With no bed to stay in, the Coalition's survey found that these young people sleep in subway and bus stations or in abandoned buildings where they are often persuaded by pimps to trade sex for a warm place to sleep or for money for food.

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