

H.201

Extend length of time that a child may remain at a shelter designated by the Commissioner of the Department for Children & Families

Services and Supports for Youth who are homeless or have run away from home

DCF and Vermont Coalition for Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP)

- Close working partnership
- DCF regulates Commissioner Designated Shelters that are part of VCRHYP
- VCRHYP member agencies work with youth and their families.

Commissioner Designated Shelters

- ▶ 33 VSA § 5512 authorizes the commissioner of DCF to designate facilities as qualified to house and assist children who have run away from their parents, guardian, or legal custodian for the purpose of reuniting them with their families.
- ▶ Commissioner Designated Shelters are regulated by the Family Services Division/Residential Licensing & Special Investigations Unit.

Commissioner Designated Shelter

How are youth referred?

- Self referrals
- Family
- Partner Agencies
- DCF
- Law Enforcement (which by statute can place a child at a CDS when they have reasonable grounds to believe has run away from home)
- Other

Commissioner Designated Shelters

- ▶ In current statute, a child may be housed for a period up to 7 days.
- ▶ When a child is referred to the shelter the program notifies the parents, guardians or custodians within 24 hours and obtains their permission
- ▶ The program works to mediate differences between the child and their parents, guardians or custodians.
- ▶ During the time the child is at the shelter, the legal custody of the child shall remain with the parent, unless otherwise designated by the juvenile court.
- ▶ After 7 days, the child is released to his or her parents, guardian or custodian
 - ▶ OR the child is brought to Juvenile Court by a law enforcement officer

Reason for H.201

- ▶ The federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act sets the limit for shelter stays at 21 days.
- ▶ Allowing a longer stay would:
 - ▶ Align state statute with nationally recognized best practice and policy.
 - ▶ Shelters would have additional time to support and stabilize youth who are presenting more complex needs than when this policy was adopted in 2003.
 - ▶ The additional time is used to support the youth's efforts to reunify with their family.
 - ▶ Or, if that proves to be an unsafe option, an alternative placement can be coordinated with DCF. (If appropriate, the child can be deemed by family court to be in the custody of DCF.)