

OFFERED BY COUNCILOR MICHELLE WU



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING LGBTQ YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

- WHEREAS:* The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children estimates that there are approximately 1.7 million youth under the age of 18 who are homeless each year in the United States; and
- WHEREAS:* The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that there are approximately 6,000 high school students in Massachusetts who are homeless and without adult support and supervision; there are likely many more high school-aged unaccompanied homeless youth that were not accounted for because they are no longer in school; and
- WHEREAS:* The Massachusetts Coalition on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth defines youth as those 24 years old and under; and homelessness as those who are not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian and lack a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence.
- WHEREAS:* While the exact number of LGBTQ homeless youth is unknown due to barriers in data collection, national estimates and local service providers demonstrate that LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented, accounting for as much as 40% of the homeless youth population while only constituting 3-4% of the general population; and
- WHEREAS:* Homeless youth in the city have reported episodes of intimidation, stolen property, assault, and harassment when staying in adult shelters, therefore preferring to live on the streets rather than access emergency shelter beds in city shelters for anyone over 18 years old; and
- WHEREAS:* Youth homelessness leads to economic instability, inability to continue education, physical and mental health problems, the necessity to engage in dangerous survival methods such as exchanging sex for shelter and food, higher rates of suicide attempts, increased drug and alcohol abuse, and higher rates of involvement with the criminal justice system; these problems are compounded by the social stigma LGBTQ youth already face due to their sexual and gender identity; and
- WHEREAS:* Bridge Over Troubled Waters is the only organization in the city of Boston that provides emergency shelter beds specifically for homeless youth, with twelve beds available each night for youth aged 18-24; while the Waltham House, located in Waltham, MA, offers transitional housing for up to 12 LGBTQ youth aged 14-18

years old, there are no emergency shelter beds specifically for LGBTQ homeless youth; and

WHEREAS: There are no emergency shelter beds available in the city of Boston for youth under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by adults; and

WHEREAS: Other cities such as New York (Ali Forney Center), Detroit (Ruth's House), and Los Angeles (LA Gay and Lesbian Center) have identified a need for and created LGBTQ-specific emergency shelter space for youth; and

WHEREAS: Additional wraparound services, such as school support, job training, mental health care, substance abuse intervention, and shelter space for LGBTQ homeless youth would make it easier for youth to access housing or reunify with family, thus decreasing the amount of chronically homeless adults in the future and saving the city money on health and housing needs in the long term; *NOW*

THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED,

That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to examine the resources needed to address and support the population of LGBTQ homeless youth in the city and gather recommendations on possible next steps, including potential solutions to address emergency shelter, transitional housing, community space, and targeted wraparound services.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED,

Filed on: July 7, 2014