May 1, 2026

Submitted via Regulatons.gov
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Regulation Recissions Under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Program, Docket Number ACF-2026-0397, RIN Number 0970-AD37

To Whom It May Concern,

The National Network for Youth (NN4Y) submits this comment in response to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Notice) for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program.

NN4Y is a national nonprofit organization representing over 300 youth homelessness service providers and young people across the country. Our members operate outreach programs, shelters, transitional and permanent housing programs, host homes, and prevention initiatives in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities nationwide, including as RHYA grantees. NN4Y was founded in 1974, the same year as RHYA, and we have been at the forefront of every expansion and improvement to RHYA over the decades.

Every year, 4.2 million youth, young adults, and young parent families under age 25 experience homelessness on their own in America.[1] Preventing and ending homelessness as early in a person's life as possible is necessary to prevent chronic homelessness and reduce taxpayer burden. Cities across the country that have conducted surveys of their chronically homeless adult population consistently find that 25 percent first experienced homelessness before the age of 18, and an additional 25 percent first experienced homelessness between the ages of 18 to 24.[2, 3, 4] Knowing this, it becomes clear that housing and support services that target young people aged 25 and under are necessary to prevent and reduce chronic adult homelessness. Furthermore, the cost of youth homelessness for taxpayers, including associated costs such as lost earnings, lost tax payments, public crime expenditures, victim costs, welfare support programs, excess tax burden, and public housing support, is an estimated $26,433 per year, per individual.[5] Applied to the 4.2 million American youth who experience

[1] Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/VoYC-LGBTQ-Brief-FINAL.pdf.
[2] Economic Roundtable. (2018). Escape Routes: MetaAnalysis of Homelessness in LA. https://economicrt.org/publication/escape-routes.
[3] All Home. (2020). Count Us In: Seattle/King County Point-in-Time Count of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness. https://kcrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CountUs-In-2020-Final_7.29.2020-1.pdf.
[4] Wilder Research. (2023). 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study [detailed data, question 38]. https://www.wilder.org/mnhomeless/results/detaileddata.
[5] Foldes, S. & Lubov, A. (2015). The Economic Burden of Youth Experiencing Homelessness and the Financial Case for Investing in Interventions to Change Peoples' Lives: An Estimate of the Short-and Long-Term Costs to Taxpayers and Society in Hennepin County, Minnesota. YouthLink. https://www.youthlinkmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/the-economic-burden-of-homeless-youth-in-hennepin-county.pdf

homelessness each year, the economic burden of youth homelessness and its related social costs is over $111 billion per year.

Access to programs that target the unique needs of young people under the age of 25—including housing, education, employment, and strengthening families—is critical to achieving stability and breaking the cycles of homelessness and poverty. These youth-specific programs are also at the forefront of preventing and ending the trafficking of young people experiencing homelessness—one in five 18 to 25 year olds experiencing homelessness are trafficked for sex, labor, or both.[6] As the nation's foremost program specifically for youth, young adults, and young parent families experiencing homelessness, the need for the high-quality, consistent services that RHYA provides cannot be overstated.

NN4Y has always worked alongside providers to advance bipartisan solutions that strengthen RHYA, and this comment is no exception. The recommendations here come directly from the expertise of over twenty long-time RHYA grantees who are committed to maintaining the high standards and outcomes that RHYA has been able to achieve while also seeking to improve services for young people.

We are concerned that the removal of certain regulations would:

- Destabilize the consistent, national standard that RHYA programs are held to. RHYA is highly effective and produces very strong positive outcomes for youth. This is in part because of the high standards that are expected across programs as maintained in the regulations. Regulations also help provide continuity in priorities year-to-year, reducing potential disruptions to service provision, particularly for programs operating in the middle of a grant period.
- Disrupt stability for long-term program planning. Grantees rely on regulatory language when designing their 3- or 5-year service models, or in anticipation of a new grant application. Removing them can create uncertainty and undermine sustainable program development.

We are also concerned that the justifications given for many of the proposed recissions are incomplete and insufficient to warrant removing the entire regulation section instead of a particular provision within the section.

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[6] Murphy, Laura. *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study Executive Summary.* (2017). Loyola University. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5887a2a61b631bfbbc1ad83a/t/59498e69197aea24a33a640b/1497992809780/CovenantHouseReport.pdf.

We respectfully disagree with the justifications that sections **1351.10** (What is the purpose of Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grants?), **1351.14** (What is the period for which a grant will be awarded?), and **1351.15** (What costs are supportable under a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant?) are unnecessary for regulation and better suited for the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). A NOFO should build off of what is stated in statute and regulation. A NOFO is not meant to take the place of regulation, nor would it be appropriate for it to do so because a NOFO does not have the force of law in the way that statute and regulation do. Furthermore, relying on a NOFO—which can and does change from year to year—to define the critical information that these regulation sections contain could exceed statutory authority if the purpose of the program as stated in the NOFO contradicts statute. This could cause significant delays in funding each year a new NOFO is released as it is carefully reviewed by HHS, grantees, and other stakeholders to contain all the necessary information about RHYA's purpose without exceeding statutory authority.

We also disagree that these regulations provide no instruction. Subsection (b) of section **1351.10** (What is the purpose of Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grants?) in particular contains relevant, clarifying information that is not listed in statute, including listing allowable uses of RHYA funding; ensuring that services are appropriate to the youth they're serving in order to maintain efficacy; regulating that RHYA providers must use a positive youth development model, which is a research-based approach that is part of what makes RHYA programs so successful; and establishing that youth served by an RHYA provider must be connected to education and employment. These components of subsection (b) ensure that RHYA programs are high-quality and effective by delivering appropriate services to the youth population. It is critical that this remains in the regulation so that the RHYA program will remain consistently high-quality.

Subsection (b) of section **1351.14** (What is the period for which a grant will be awarded?) also provides instruction that is not found in the statute around continuation awards. It clarifies that multi-year grants will be evaluated each year of the grant period to ensure that the grantee's work is satisfactory. This helps ensure that the limited RHYA funding continues to go to programs that demonstrate measurable outcomes, effective service delivery, and are responsible stewards of federal dollars.

We recommend that section **1351.15** (What costs are supportable under a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant?) is also retained in regulation. Similarly to our reasoning to retain 1351.10, 1351.14, and 1351.15, we argue that this section is suited for regulation since it further clarifies and expands upon the statute and ensures consistency across programs and grant cycles. This section includes allowing the use of funds for staff training, which helps to maintain high-quality and effective programs as well as clarifying additional allowable costs that are unique to research and evaluation, communications, and technical assistance grants. It is important to keep broad special allowable uses in the regulation to maintain consistency across the program and to ensure that providers are able to plan ahead for their grant applications.

The RHYA providers who were consulted on this comment expressed particular concern for removing section 1351.15. Providers often reference this section (and others that are similar) in the regulation to understand definitions, reference the allowable uses that are not typically identified elsewhere, and maintain other core components of the RHYA program. They expressed concern that removing these core components from the regulation would destabilize the approach to RHYA services, which could be subject to drastic shifts from year to year, or, as noted previously, subject to litigation each grant cycle if the NOFO oversteps its authority.

Next, we strongly recommend against removing section **1351.16** (What costs are not allowable under a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant?). ACF stated during its last regulation update[7] that the clarifications in subsection (a) were necessary because they were receiving budget proposals that included unallowable uses due to unclear NOFOs. This is further evidence of the stability and clarity that regulations offer, which are complimented and further supported by the NOFOs. In order to maintain the instructive quality of subsection (b), the regulation should refer to section **1351.1** (Significant Terms) (e.g., "For further unallowable uses, see § 1351.1").

We also recommend against removing sections **1351.24** (What are the additional requirements that the Basic Center Program grantees must meet?), **1351.25** (What are the additional requirements that the Transitional Living Program and Maternity Group Home grantees must meet?), and **1351.27** (What are the additional requirements that the Street Outreach Program grantees must meet?). Similarly to our previous arguments, we do not believe that the reasoning is justified to remove these regulatory requirements that have the force of law and are consistent over time, and instead subject them to a periodic NOFO/terms and conditions process. If the NOFO requirements fluctuate year over year, it might render the NOFO subject to litigation for exceeding statutory authority or other Administrative Procedure Act violations.

Furthermore, we do not agree that these regulations do not provide instructive information. In particular, subsections (a) through (e) of section 1351.24:

- (a) and (b): Ensures that Basic Center Programs (BCP) operate 24/7 intake and shelter to meet the crisis needs of minors experiencing homelessness.
- (c): Ensures that BCPs are all utilizing trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices are absolutely necessary to effectively resolving crisis situations for these youth and their families.
- (d): Dictates that grantees must provide core services to clients and families both within and outside the shelter. This is not a suggestion—it is a component that is critical to the continued effectiveness of BCPs and important to retaining consistency across programs.
- (e): Ensures that grantees are immediately starting the process of family reunification efforts, a core component of the BCP.

[7] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/12/20/2016-30241/runaway-and-homeless-youth

Similarly, subsections (a) and (b) in section 1351.27 are instructive and clarifying, especially considering the Street Outreach Program (SOP) statute is so general:

- (a): Establishes a clear purpose for the SOP that is not in statute: "Assist clients in leaving the streets, making healthy choices, and building trusting relationships in areas where targeted youth congregate."
- (b): Dictates that grantees must connect young people with services and shelter, a critical component to the success of SOP.

These regulations are not arbitrary. They set a consistent standard and minimum service requirements for a successful RHYA program that can be further expounded on in the NOFO, if necessary.

We are also concerned that the reasoning given for removing these regulations only applies to one subsection that each of the three (1351.24, 1351.25, and 1351.27) share: "Additional requirements included in the funding opportunity announcement." The Notice's reasoning for removing each of these sections specifically calls out this subsection. There are two additional sections that are very similar to the three proposed for removal: **1351.23** (What are the additional requirements that apply to the Basic Center, Transitional Living and Street Outreach Program grants?) and **1351.26** (What are the additional requirements that both the Basic Center and Transitional Living Program grantees must meet?). However, these sections were not proposed for removal and, importantly, do not contain the "Additional requirements…" subsection. Therefore, we are concerned that the three proposed for removal were only flagged because of this subsection and not properly analyzed in full, rendering the justification arbitrary.

Lastly, we do not agree that the justifications for removing sections **1351.11** (Who is eligible to apply for a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant?) and **1351.12** (Who gets priority for the award of a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant?) are sufficient for their removal, since the regulations are not duplicative of the statute and in fact make important clarifications to the statute that are vital to the program.

Section 1351.11 states that "Public (state and local) and private non-profit entities, and coordinated networks of such entities, are eligible to apply for a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant unless they are part of the juvenile justice system." This regulation offers additional guidance and clarity that is not found in the statute, therefore it is not duplicative. The statutes that are referenced in the Notice's justification differ in that:

- 1211(a)(1): Does not specify that public (state and local) or coordinated networks are eligible, or that juvenile justice systems are ineligible.
- 11222: Does not specify any of the entities in the regulation.

- 11261(a): Only specifies private nonprofit agencies as eligible. The next section of the statute, 11261(b), says priority should be given to public agencies and private nonprofit agencies. The regulation is needed not only to clarify that public agencies can indeed apply, but also to ensure that juvenile justice systems cannot apply.

The statute is patchy when it comes to who is eligible to apply for RHYA grants. Some sections list some entities while leaving out others, and one section does not specify any eligible entities. The regulation is necessary to clarify the statute and provide consistency across the core RHYA grants. We are concerned that removing the regulation could prevent public agencies from receiving RHYA funding (right now, 9 public agencies receive an RHYA grant, in particular BCP) and/or prevent private non-profits, such as faith-based organizations, from receiving RHYA funding.[8] Furthermore, the regulation's clarification that juvenile justice systems are not eligible is critical to maintaining the purpose of RHYA. RHYA became law in 1974 as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act with the express purpose of establishing community-based alternatives to justice involvement for youth. As such, it is important to maintain this boundary in the regulation.

Section 1351.12 builds upon the statute to further clarify what applicants should be prioritized for a RHYA grant. While some subsections are duplicative of or very similar to the statute, there are subsections that are not, and therefore are not justified in their removal. Specifically:

- Subsection (a)(2) clarifies that BCP priority should be awarded to "Eligible applicants that request grants of less than $200,000 *or such figure as Congress may specify*" (emphasis added). "Or such figure as Congress may specify" does not appear in the statute. Allowing Congress this flexibility is important since preferred grant award amounts should be proportionate to that year's appropriations level for RHYA, which then determines the yearly state allocations for BCP. This subsection is not duplicative and should be retained.
- Subsection (d) clarifies that grants for the national communications system (NCS) should be prioritized for "applicants that have experience in providing electronic communications services to runaway and homeless youth, including telephone, *Internet, mobile applications, and other technology-driven services*" (emphasis added). The statute only specifies "grant applicants that have experience in providing telephone services." It is critical to ensure that the NCS is experienced in a wide range of communications services for young people, and in particular those communications that young people are most likely to utilize (i.e., not just telephone calls). This subsection is not duplicative and should be retained.

Finally, the Notice gives no justification to remove subsection (f), regarding integrating performance standards into the grantmaking, monitoring, and evaluation processes. The subsection states that further details will be provided in the NOFO, but it is important to maintain the regulatory directive to

[8] Justifications from the last RHYA regulation change in 2016 state that keeping "non-profit entities" in the regulation was important since it includes faith-based providers. See https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/12/20/2016-30241/runaway-and-homeless-youth under "Eligibility for Grants."

include performance standards in NOFOs to ensure that repeat RHYA applicants are of high quality. It is essential to continue providing high quality care to young people and to prevent federal funding from going to ineffective programs. Furthermore, the RHYA grantees consulted for this comment noted that the regulatory (i.e., legal) emphasis on consistently meeting performance standards helps them secure funding from other sources (state, local, private, etc.), which is necessary to operate a RHYA program, both to meet the required match and because a RHYA grant does not cover the full cost of operating a program. The grantees also noted that the regulatory emphasis on consistently meeting performance standards helps them maintain and document compliance. This subsection is important to maintaining consistency and quality, is utilized and referenced frequently by RHYA providers, and is given no justification for its rescission—we strongly recommend this subsection is retained in regulation as is.

In summary, we are concerned that the rescission of the regulations and subsections we reviewed in this comment would destabilize the consistent, national standard that RHYA programs are held to and disrupt stability for long-term program planning. We are also concerned that many of the Notice's justifications are not sufficient for removing entire sections or certain subsections of the regulation, and could be found to be arbitrary. And finally, we are concerned that it would be inappropriate to shift the majority of these regulations to the NOFO, as NOFOs do not have the force of law, change from year to year, and could be subject to litigation if they exceed their statutory mandate.

Thank you for your commitment to improving the critical RHYA program and for considering our recommendations. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

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