

ASSEMBLY SENIOR ISSUES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
ASSEMBLY, No. 2985

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 3, 1999

The Assembly Senior Issues and Community Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 2985.

The Assembly Senior Issues and Community Services Committee reports favorably the Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly Bill No. 2985.

This committee substitute creates the "New Jersey Homeless Youth Act." The substitute would require the Department of Human Services to establish and support a comprehensive program for homeless youth by contracting with organizations and agencies that provide street outreach programs or basic center shelter programs or transitional living programs to homeless youth in this State.

Under the provisions of the substitute, a street outreach program would be required to enhance the accessibility of resources to homeless youth by locating, contacting and providing services to the youth through mobile outreach. The services provided may include, but are not limited to: assistance in finding temporary or short-term shelter; assistance in obtaining food; a clothing allowance; individual and group counseling in the area of violence prevention; information and referral services regarding organizations and agencies that provide support services to homeless youth; and assistance in obtaining medical care.

A basic center shelter program would be required to provide homeless youth with a 24-hour, seven-day a week, walk-in access to emergency short term residential care. Such a program would provide the homeless youths with a stable out-of-home placement and help reunite them with their family, if family reunification is in their best interest. The services provided may include, but are not limited to: family reunification services; individual, family and group counseling; food; a clothing allowance; medical care; educational services; recreational activities; and advocacy and referral services.

The substitute would require a basic center shelter to attempt to notify the homeless youth's parent or legal guardian, within 24 hours of the youth's admission, if he is under the age of 18. The notification

would provide the homeless youth's parent or legal guardian with a description of the youth's condition and the circumstances surrounding his admission to the basic center shelter, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. Under the provisions of the substitute, compelling reasons include, but are not limited to, circumstances in which the youth is or has been a victim of child abuse or neglect.

If a homeless youth is under the age of 18, the substitute would require the shelter to notify the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) within 24 hours of the youth's admission, in order to determine if the youth is under DYFS' legal care or custody. If the youth is under DYFS' care or custody, DYFS in consultation with the shelter would determine what services would be provided to the youth. The services may include, but are not limited to, crisis intervention services, continued temporary placement in the basic shelter for up to 30 days, placement in an alternative living arrangement or referral to a transitional living program or to other appropriate organizations and agencies.

The substitute would provide that if, as a result of any information supplied by a homeless youth, a basic center shelter has reason to believe that the youth is an abused or neglected child, the shelter would be required to report the allegation to DYFS. The youth may remain at the shelter for up to 30 days pending DYFS' disposition of the case.

In addition, the substitute would require a basic center shelter to notify the juvenile-family crisis intervention unit, within 24 hours of a homeless youth's admission, if the shelter believes that a juvenile-family crisis exists. The youth may remain at the shelter for up to 30 days pending the intervention unit's referral of the case to the court.

The substitute would also provide that a homeless youth, who is under the age of 18, may be able to remain at a basic center shelter for no more than 30 days without the consent of the his parent or legal guardian. If it appears that arrangements for the youth's return home or a temporary placement in an alternative living arrangement cannot be made, the youth's stay at the shelter may be extended for an additional 30 days, with written consent from his parent or legal guardian.

With regard to the case of a homeless youth from another state who is under the age of 18, the substitute would require the basic center shelter to contact the Compact Administrator of the Interstate Compact on Juveniles, as soon as practicable but within 24 hours of the youth's admission to the shelter. The Compact Administrator would be required to facilitate the youth's return home or make other suitable care arrangements for the homeless.

Under the provisions of the substitute, a transitional living program would provide residential care and treatment services for up to 18 months to homeless youth between the ages of 16 to 21 who demonstrate the maturity to function with minimal adult supervision.

This program would assist in the maintenance of homeless youth in a living arrangement that will prepare them for independence and self sufficiency. The program may accomplish this goal through the direct provision of, or through referrals to other organizations and agencies for services, as determined by the department's contract, which may include: educational assessment and attachment to an educational program; career planning, employment and life skills training; job placement; budgeting and money management; assistance in securing housing appropriate to a homeless youth's needs and income; and assistance in accessing other social services as may be appropriate.

The substitute grants the Commissioner of Human Services rule making authority to promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of the substitute.

The substitute would also appropriate \$4,000,000 to the Department of Human Services to contract with organizations and agencies, licensed by the department, to provide street outreach or basic center shelter or transitional living programs to homeless youth. The substitute would also provide that six percent of the annual appropriation to the department be allocated to fund the department's administrative costs in implementing the provisions of the substitute.