



# Local News

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## Homeless youth bill clears panel

By Bryan Corbin (Contact)  
Thursday, February 7, 2008

A bill to help undercounted homeless youth gain access to shelter and social services sailed through a state Senate committee on Wednesday.

Inspired by a situation in Evansville, House Bill 1165 — authored by state Rep. Dennis Avery and sponsored by state Sen. Vaneta Becker — now moves to the full Senate. The bill does a number of things, including:

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n Ordering a head count or census of homeless juveniles in Indiana, where current estimates are believed to be greatly undercounted.

n Requiring the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority to streamline the process so homeless youth can be informed about and gain access to services that could assist them.

n Allowing homeless shelters and food pantries to serve "unattached" youth ages 16 and 17. Under current law, such homeless youth can be turned away.

n Changing the notification requirements so shelters for runaways no longer have to notify parents within 24 hours that their son or daughter has arrived at the shelter. The new time period for notification would be 72 hours, consistent with federal law.

Instead, the shelter would have to notify the Department of Child Services within 24 hours so caseworkers could start an investigation. Advocates for the homeless said the extra time is necessary sometimes to get homeless youth to talk to caseworkers in instances where they are running away from abuse or neglect.

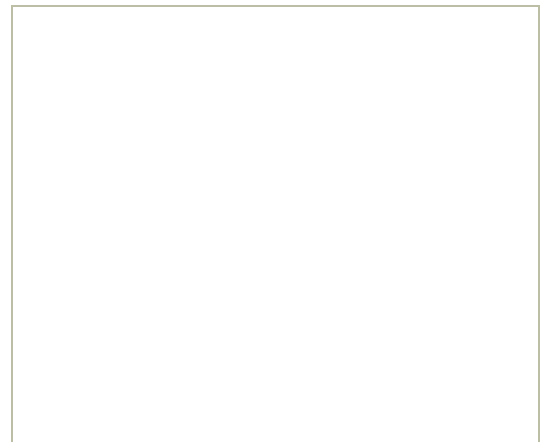
n Changing rules to encourage sibling visitation between children who are in separate foster care.

The legislation was prompted by the findings of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County Homeless Youth Council, which Avery's wife, Patty Avery, co-chaired. It was estimated there are 362 homeless youth in Vanderburgh County.

"I was unaware of the extent of the problem when it was brought to my attention," Dennis Avery, D-Evansville, told the Senate committee. "I assumed there were people taking care of this problem."

Alison Cole, policy director of the Indiana Coalition on Housing and Homeless Issues, said her organization estimated between 19,000 and 27,000 Hoosiers were homeless between July 2006 and July 2007. Getting a fix on how many youths were homeless is difficult, she said.

"Because of the way the law is today and because youth are so discouraged from seeking any kind of reliable, reputable help through a homeless shelter or food bank, our system only counted



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430 unattached youth, and we know that is a great undercount," Cole said.

"And so by changing this law, we think we will begin to be able to see more youth come get services," she said.

"We can start counting them and start to really quantify how big the problem is. Aside from all the humanitarian reasons why we might want to pass this bill, we think by passing this bill we can start to really see the size of this problem and really start to figure out long-term solutions."

Previously, Avery's bill passed the Indiana House 92-0. On Wednesday, the Senate Commerce, Public Policy and Interstate Cooperation Committee approved the bill by a vote of 10-0 during a hearing that was Webcast on the Internet.

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**Your Turn**

**Posted by Warden on February 7, 2008 at 2:18 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

Sounds pretty good. One question: WHAT is the definition of 'youth' in this article??? JUST male? Or also female?? Under 18 or 21?? Or ??? If a 'youth' is with a parent who is homeless, is s/he NOT 'homeless'?

**Posted by todayonly on February 7, 2008 at 6:43 a.m. (Suggest removal)**

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