



Protecting Youth Who Run Away to Escape Abuse

As an OHIO YAB Youth Ambassador, I have been reaching out to Ohio legislators to develop safeguards to support youth who run away to escape abuse. I want these young people (a.) not to be charged with a status offense for running away, (b.) not to be sent to detention, (c.) to be entrusted to children services and have their allegation of being abused be thoroughly investigated.

My name is Alivia, and I want to share part of my story, and how it intersects with running away to escape abuse. I ran away multiple times from foster care and from kinship care.

I ran because I didn't feel safe in the placement I was in...

When I ran away, I went to the library. I was looking for clarity, for fresh air, just to be safe and calm within myself. I ran away to try to seek a place of safety, but I just kept getting placed farther and farther away.

It was very rough trying to be heard. When I ran away, I was punished and sent to a juvenile detention center.

I emancipated from foster care through a kinship placement. Today, I am a statewide youth leader and serve as Vice President of the Franklin County Youth Advisory Board. One of my goals is to pursue culinary school at Columbus State Community College.

I wish that when youth ran away, people would listen to them and take their words more seriously. And ask them: "Why did you run away? What's going on? What can we do?"

The LSC wording as designed by Ohio foster youth includes three important provisions to better safeguard youth who experience abuse, and run away to try to escape it:

1. **Proposed change to the Unruly Child Definition (ORC 2151.022):** Youth would not be considered “unruly” or “wayward” solely based on running away.
2. **Proposed change to the procedures when Taking a Child into Custody (ORC 2151.31):** Youth who run away to escape abuse would be taken to children services, rather than a juvenile detention center.
3. **Proposed change to the Procedures After Taking Child into Custody (ORC 2151.311):** The current default is to send the child or teen back to the custodial placement they ran away from.

The wording as designed by youth would change this so that **if the person taking the child into custody has a reasonable suspicion that the release of the child to the child's parents, guardian, or other custodian would subject the child to abuse, they would take the child or teen to children services instead.**