



## **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 Yalonda Sherrod, and I want to share part of my story, and how it intersects with running away to escape abuse. I was in foster care from age 8 - 21 years old. During my time in foster care, I felt incredibly alone.

I ran away multiple times from unsafe residential placements. During my time in residential placements, I experienced physical and emotional abuse. At one placement, I was kept in the basement. At another, they had us dig up muddy posts. At a third placement, there was a riot.

Every time I ran away from a residential placement, I was sent to a juvenile detention center, and then sent to another residential facility.

At no point did I receive emotional support, medical attention or trauma-informed care. The only adult in my life who remained a constant was my guardian ad litem.

Today, I am a statewide youth leader and an active member of the Hamilton County Youth Advisory Board.

I want better for my siblings of the foster care system than to experience a heartless game of musical chairs where they are shuttled from residential to juvenile detention centers and then back again.

They deserve better than that – and so did I.

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.