



Safeguarding Youth Who Run Away To Escape Abuse

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board is a statewide organization of young people, ages 14-24, who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care, including foster care, kinship care, adoption, group homes and residential facilities.

The Problem:

- ***A status offense is a noncriminal act*** that is considered a law violation only because of a youth's status as a minor. One such act is running away.
- ***In Ohio, status offenses are classified as "unruly children,"*** and there is no lower age specified for an "unruly child." This means that a child as young as 10 who runs away to seek to escape an abusive situation could be charged with a status offense for doing so.
- ***In addition, if the young person runs away again,*** the court can punish the youth by ordering secure confinement. Placement in a juvenile detention facility puts youth at risk of further harm, and makes it more likely that the young person engages in delinquent behavior in the future.

The Solution:

- ***The OHIO YAB has drafted LSC language*** to seek to establish a less punitive response for youth who run away to escape abuse. Rather than subjecting the young person to punishment and the risk of additional abuse, we want the young person's abuse allegations to be investigated.
- ***Across multiple studies of runaway youth,*** abuse rates range from 40-60%. Youth who go missing for longer periods of time, and who travel farthest away, are most likely to have been abused previously.

The Ask:

- ***Please consider championing our cause.*** Assign a staff member to review our [draft LSC language](#) and a [comparison of current vs. proposed ORC wording](#), focusing on three sections that have not been updated since 2017. We welcome insights from your staff when it comes to honing this wording to achieve its purpose of safeguarding youth who run away to escape abuse.
- ***Ohio was the last state in the nation to*** make police officers mandatory reporters of abuse and neglect. HB 137 passed in 2019, but we still aren't sure how officers are being trained.

Contact: Lisa Dickson, (614) 787-5257, lisa@fosteractionohio.org

