

## Crisis Residential Centers

A Critical Safety Net for Washington's At Risk Youth

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# WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

## WACF Position Paper

### Background

Prior to 1977, runaway youth were classified as status offenders and often found themselves in secure lock up in the counties' juvenile detention facilities. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 decriminalized status offenses and mandated the development of Crisis Residential Centers to hold runaways until they could be reunited with family or placed in a foster or group care facility. At least one staff secure Crisis Residential Center was developed in each of DSHS' regions and in several instances, more than one Crisis Residential Center was opened. Today, 41 staff secure beds provide services throughout the state.

In 1995, the legislature passed the BECCA bill which introduced another genre of Crisis Centers, Secure Crisis Residential Center, for youth who are in need of a secure placement. After 1995, a Secure Crisis Residential Center was opened in each of DSHS' regions, often co-located in a Juvenile Detention Center. Today, 18 secure beds are scattered throughout the state.

Both types of Crisis Residential Centers provide temporary shelter for youth ages 12-17 who run away from home or are in severe conflict with their parents, and foster youth in need of a crisis placement. CRCs are available 24-7 and placement is limited to a maximum of 15 days. Referrals for Secure Crisis Centers (lock up) mostly originate with law enforcement whereas referrals for staff secure Crisis Centers (non-lock up) originate from Children's Administration caseworkers and secondarily law enforcement.

Crisis Residential Centers play a key role in supporting the Braam lawsuit settlement by maintaining children/youth in their homes by providing temporary placement; stabilize foster placements by serving as an emergency placement when needed. Crisis Residential Centers are key in preventing youth homeless which leads directly to adult homelessness, and in preventing recruitment of young girls and boys into commercial sex trafficking.

**RCW 13.32.a.010** recognizes that crisis residential centers provide an opportunity for children to receive short-term necessary support and nurturing in cases where there may be abuse or neglect. The legislature intends to provide appropriate residential services, including secure facilities, to protect, stabilize and treat children with serious problems.

**Crisis Residential Centers are located in the following counties:\***

County	Regional CRC beds	Secure CRC beds
Chelan	0	4
Clallam	0	4
Clark	4	6
King	12	6
Snohomish	6	0
Spokane	8	0
Thurston	7	0
Yakima/Kennewick	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>25</b>

\* It should be noted that these are regional facilities which admit youth from a larger cluster of counties. All facilities with the possible exception of King County admit youth from surrounding counties.

### **Problem**

The 15% reduction budget proposal completely eliminates Children's Administration's Crisis Residential Centers. The result will create unsafe conditions for runaway and homeless youth with no safety net for their care. In addition, Children's Administration caseworkers will no longer have a safe and quick placement to hold children pending family reunification or foster placement disruption Program elimination undermines and erodes the Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 by eliminating emergency shelter options for runaways and high needs dependent children and impacts the Braam settlement regarding services for adolescents.

**Eliminating Crisis Residential Centers will impact 2,400 high risk teens.**

### **Cost**

Staff Secure Crisis Residential Centers and Secure Crisis Residential Centers have a \$11.7 million biennial budget

### **Solution**

Retain and expand both genres of Crisis Residential Centers to preserve the Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 and the Braam settlement and to ensure child safety and essential crisis placement services for adolescents.

There is a lot of momentum to include Crisis Residential Centers, HOPE and Street Youth into proposed Homeless Youth legislation in the next legislative session and move this cluster to the Department of Commerce. While the move to Commerce can be very positive it could shift the focus away from CRCs serving mostly state dependents to serving a higher percentage of runaway and homeless youth. The drawback of this move is that it could adversely impact Children's Administration's ability to place high needs adolescents into a safe and staff secure placement.

If the move to Commerce is to be seriously considered the following issues must be addressed before having our full support:

- How will the move impact CA's emergency placement needs?
- Will the Gatekeeper role be moved out of CA to the CRCs?
- Even with the move to Commerce, CA's Division of Licensing Resource will be responsible for licensing CRCs
- CA's Child Protective Services will remain responsible for investigations at CRCs
- Reimbursement rates and funding structure should not be reduced or changed due to severity of children placed and emergent nature of CRC's mission
- Fund this cluster of programs through a legislative appropriation, thereby placing the programs and associated funding into a secure account that can't be reduced without legislative approval.

The Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth is on record as supporting retaining Crisis Residential Centers.