



Desired Outcome:

- **To establish a less punitive response for youth who run away** and ensure that their records are automatically expunged of this status offense when they enter young adulthood.

How Many Youth Run Away?

- **Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away each year**, according to the National Runaway Safeline.

Why Do Youth Run Away?

- The most common reason youth give for running away is seeking to escape a negative home environment.
- Across multiple studies of runaway youth, **rates of physical abuse range from 40-60%**.
- 34% of teens reported sexual abuse to the National Runaway Safeline as the reason why they left home.
- Youth who go missing for longer periods of time, and who travel farthest away, are **most likely to have been abused previously**.

In Search of Safety:

- **For those who run away to escape abuse**, their biggest fear is being returned back to the abusive situation.
- According to the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, agencies are required to provide a counseling session after youth run away, to figure out why – but this doesn't always happen.
- **Too often, youth are returned to abusive situations** and they often run away again.

What is a Status Offense?

- **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 with a term of secure confinement. These instances of secure confinement do nothing to help youth and can, in fact, make it more likely that young person engages in delinquent behavior in the future.
- **From a federal sense, this is outdated policy.** When the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act was reauthorized in 2018, one of its core requirements was the deinstitutionalization of juveniles for status offenses.

Examples from Other States:

- Washington was once the nation's longtime leader in jailing youth for noncriminal offenses, such as running away. But in 2019, Governor Jay Inslee signed Senate Bill 5290 into law, which banned judges from sending foster youth to detention when they run away.
- In Texas, Senator Nathan Johnson has introduced SB 404 (HB 1709), which aims to decriminalize running away as a status offense and prohibit juvenile detention for youth who have run away. The bill redirects youth to emergency shelters and crisis intervention services.

Risks for Runaways:

- Runaways are in a difficult situation – it isn't safe for them on the street, but it might not be safe for them to return home either.
- The current punitive response makes youth fear authorities, rather than going to them for help.
- While on the run, youth are at risk of violence and human trafficking.