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Summary of Testimony Supporting: S.B. 5782, An Act Concerning the Age of a Child for Purposes of Jurisdiction in Delinquency Matters and Proceedings

Testimony of Shelley Geballe, Ellen Scalettar, Tim Nelson and Theresa Sgobba To the Committee on Judiciary, March 13, 2006

ACCY strongly supports S.B. 5782, An Act Concerning the Age of a Child for Purposes of Jurisdiction in Delinquency Matters and Proceedings. With this change, Connecticut will at last acknowledge and respond to the physical and mental developmental differences that distinguish children under age 18 from adult offenders and the moral problems with treating them the same, and will bring the state into line with the majority of states that recognize 18 as the appropriate upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS UNUSUAL: Connecticut is one of only three states that do not at least include 16-year-olds in the juvenile court's jurisdiction.

CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS INCONSISTENT WITH OTHER STATE LAWS: Most CT statutes do not vest young people with adult responsibilities until they are at least 18.

CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IGNORES SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE demonstrating important developmental differences between 16- and 17-year-olds and adults. Recently, neurologists have demonstrated a clear difference between the brains of 16-year-olds and older youth.

CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH DOES NOT PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY. Research shows that the juvenile justice system is better equipped to improve the lives of youth who run afoul of the law – and prevent their further criminal involvement – than is the adult system. Studies that compare recidivism rates of youth handled in the juvenile system with those handled in the adult criminal justice system suggest that youth processed in the adult system are more likely to re-offend and re-offend more quickly and at higher rates than are youth treated in the juvenile justice system.

CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS EXTREMELY COSTLY. Bringing youth under 18 into the juvenile system is a much smarter way to spend Connecticut's money and may SAVE the state money in the longer term. An Implementation Team Report from 2004 tasked with identifying the costs of raising the jurisdictional age to 18 greatly over-estimated costs associated with the change and failed to take into account savings that will result from taking youth out of the adult system.

Given the compelling moral, ethical and practical mandates for raising the age of jurisdiction of the juvenile court to 18 and the flaws with the Implementation Team's Report, we urge this Committee to unanimously pass S.B. 5782, and begin work now with executive and judicial staff and those outside state government with expertise in this area to establish a careful, five-part planning process essential to make this change a success for the affected children and for Connecticut society as a whole.





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Testimony of Shelley Geballe, Ellen Scalettar, Tim Nelson and Theresa Sgobba¹
To the Committee on Judiciary
March 13, 2006

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary,

We testify on behalf of Advocates for Connecticut's Children and Youth (ACCY), a statewide, independent, citizen-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policy making process that has such a great impact on their lives. ACCY is the sister lobbying organization of Connecticut Voices for Children, on whose behalf we also testify.

ACCY strongly supports S.B. 5782, An Act Concerning the Age of a Child for Purposes of Jurisdiction in Delinquency Matters and Proceedings. This bill would change the definition of a "child" for purposes of delinquency matters and proceedings from any person under sixteen years of age to any person under seventeen years of age, effective October 2007, and would extend the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction to eighteen, effective October 2008. With this change, Connecticut will at last acknowledge and respond to the physical and mental developmental differences that distinguish children under age 18 from adult offenders and the moral problems with treating them the same, and will bring Connecticut into line with the majority of states that recognize 18 as the appropriate upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

*CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS UNUSUAL: Connecticut is one of only three states that do not at least include 16-year-olds in the juvenile court's jurisdiction. Most states treat 17- year-olds as juveniles, and nearly every state treats 16-year-olds as juveniles. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia maintain an upper age limit of 18 years old while ten states maintain an upper age limit of 17.2

*CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS INCONSISTENT WITH OTHER CONNECTICUT LAWS: Most Connecticut statutes do not vest young people with adult responsibilities until they are at least 18. A Connecticut youth who is 16 or 17 years old cannot enter a casino. A Connecticut youth who is 16 or 17 years old cannot purchase alcohol. A Connecticut youth who is 16 or 17 years old must be furnished with a free public education by her local or regional board of education. A Connecticut youth who is 16 or 17 years old cannot get a marriage license without the written consent of a parent or guardian. Together, these provisions express Connecticut's understanding that 16- and 17 year-olds are still developing, and are not capable of handling adult responsibilities.

Other statutes, in fact, recognize that youth continue to develop beyond age 18; the state's foster care system, for example, continues to support its youthful wards until age 21 if they are enrolled in higher education. And, interestingly, private industry has incorporated an understanding of continued maturation well beyond age 18. The

¹ Mr. Nelson and Ms. Sgobba are Yale Law students participating in the Yale Legislative Services program and have prepared this testimony under the supervision of Attorney Shelley Geballe (President, CT Voices for Children), Attorney Ellen Scalettar (Director, Advocates for Connecticut's Children and Youth) and Professor J. L. Pottenger, Jr. (Legislative Advocacy Clinic, Yale Law School).

² Until 1971, Connecticut itself treated all youth under 18 as juveniles.

vast majority of national car rental companies will not insure drivers under age 25; those that do usually exact a hefty surcharge.³

Two additional limitations on the rights of children under age 18 speak even more clearly to the inconsistency in Connecticut law. A 16 or 17 year old Connecticut youth cannot vote for the people who decide what counts as a crime and how criminals should be punished. And a Connecticut youth of that age cannot serve on a jury that decides whether a 16 or 17 year old defendant will go to prison. That is, Connecticut treats 16- and 17-year-olds as responsible adults when they break the law, but as irresponsible children when those laws are written and enforced.

*CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IGNORES SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE demonstrating important developmental differences between 16- and 17-year-olds and adults. Scientific research has confirmed our common sense understanding that children who are 16 or 17 years old are simply different from adults. Recently, neurologists have demonstrated a clear difference between the brains of 16-year-olds and older youth. Brain imaging studies comparing the brain activity of adults and adolescents confronted with difficult decisions have illustrated that it takes adolescents, whose brains are not yet fully developed, a longer time to figure out what is a bad idea than adults.⁴ Adults studied showed more activity in the parts of the brain that create mental imagery and the parts of the brain that often signal internal distress, suggesting that adults, when confronted with a potentially dangerous scenario, are more likely to create a mental image of possible outcomes, and to have an averse response to that image.⁵ Brain imaging—like actuaries in the car insurance industry—in fact tells us that people aren't very good at making responsible decisions until about age 25.

Because such differences directly implicate the decision-making capabilities and relative culpability of children under 18, a just system must consider these differences when deciding how to punish juveniles who commit crimes. So acknowledged the United States Supreme Court last year when it struck down the death penalty as a punishment for children under age 18 in the case Roper v. Simmons.⁶ The Court stated:

Three general differences between juveniles under 18 and adults demonstrate that juvenile offenders cannot with reliability be classified among the worst offenders. First... [a] lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility are found in youth more often than in adults and are more understandable among the young. These qualities often result in impetuous and ill-considered actions and decisions... In recognition of the comparative immaturity and irresponsibility of juveniles, almost every State prohibits those under 18 years of age from voting, serving on juries, or marrying without parental consent.

The second area of difference is that juveniles are more vulnerable or susceptible to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer pressure... ([Y] outh is more than a chronological fact. It is a time and condition of life when a person may be most susceptible to influence and psychological damage)

The third broad difference is that the character of a juvenile is not as well formed as that of an adult. The personality traits of juveniles are more transitory, less fixed.

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³ See, e.g., Alina Tugend, "Age 80 in Guernsey? Forget About Renting a Car" (New York Times, June 25, 2005), available at http://travel2.nytimes.com/2005/06/25/business/25shortcuts.html?ex=1142226000&en=71c3ddfa7ad24730&ei=5070; "Auto Insurance Tips — Who's covered under rental car insurance?" available at http://www.insurance.com/Article.aspx/Whos Covered Under Rental Car Insurance/artid/155.

⁴ See A.A. Baird, J.A. Fugelsang, and C.M. Bennett, "What were you thinking?" available at http://www.theteenbrain.com/research/projects/goodidea2.php.

⁵ Id. For example, when asked if "jumping off a roof" is a good idea, the typical adult immediately generates visual imagery of potential injury and experiences a physical aversion to that image, evoking a rapid "bad idea" response. Teenagers in the study, who took longer to respond to dangerous scenarios, seemed to be trying to decide whether or not the scenarios were actually dangerous. Perhaps because they lack the mental image and subsequent visceral response, teenagers need to reason out the question, and therefore have a more difficult time generating the correct response.

^{6 543} U.S. 551 (2005).

These differences render suspect any conclusion that a juvenile falls among the worst offenders... From a moral standpoint it would be misguided to equate the failings of a minor with those of an adult, for a greater possibility exists that a minor's character deficiencies will be reformed...

For the reasons we have discussed . . . a line must be drawn . . . The age of 18 is the point where society draws the line for many purposes between childhood and adulthood. (emphases added)

At the end of its opinion, the Supreme Court itself pointed to the many state statutes that divest youth under 18 of adult responsibilities, drawing attention to "the point where society draws the line for many purposes between childhood and adulthood." Connecticut statutes that treat 16- and 17-year-olds as if they are different from adults are consistent with the Supreme Court's explanation. Statutes that thrust 16- and 17-year-olds into the adult criminal justice system are not.

*CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH DOES NOT PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY. Research shows that the juvenile justice system is better equipped to improve the lives of youth who run afoul of the law – and prevent their further criminal involvement – than is the adult system. Studies that compare recidivism rates of youth handled in the juvenile system with those handled in the adult criminal justice system suggest that youth processed in the adult system are more likely to re-offend and re-offend more quickly and at higher rates than are youth treated in the juvenile justice system.⁷

Key differences between the juvenile and adult systems support and explain these findings. Juvenile justice systems are typically characterized by higher staff-to-juvenile ratios as well as staff focused on treatment and rehabilitation (leading to more contact and more positive contact with staff), and prioritize programming that facilitates development and encourages pro-social behavior and the development of social competencies. The adult penal system, in stark contrast, is characterized by warehousing of inmates by staff focused on custody and security, idle time, violent role models, and a culture of exploitation, domination, victimization, and criminal socialization (facilitated by the lack of correctional staff contact).8

In addition to the debilitating experiences typical of the adult system, the criminal record that follows a youth from the adult system significantly impairs his or her re-entry into society upon release, making it harder for that youth to get a job, and eventually provide support to his/her own children.

*CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT APPROACH IS EXTREMELY COSTLY. Bringing youth under 18 into the juvenile system is a much smarter way to spend Connecticut's money and may SAVE the state money in the longer term. An Implementation Team Report from 20049 tasked with identifying the costs of raising the jurisdictional age to 18 greatly over-estimated costs associated with the change and failed to take into account savings that will result from taking youth out of the adult system.

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⁷ Most studies comparing the two systems have corroborated this claim. See J.A. Fagan, "The comparative advantage of juvenile versus criminal court sanctions on recidivism among adolescent felony offenders." Law and Policy 18 (1 and 2): 77-113 (1996); D.M. Bishop, C.E. Frazier, L. Lanza-Kaduce, and L. Winner, "The transfer of juveniles to criminal court: Does it make a difference?" Crime and Delinquency, 42: 171-191 (1996); L. Winner, L. Lanza-Kaduce, D.M. Bishop, and C.E. Frazier, "The transfer of juveniles to criminal court: Reexamining recidivism over the long term." Crime and Delinquency 43(4): 548-563 (1997). Very little data exists on recidivism rates in CT. One study has estimated adult recidivism at 70% within three years (http://www.cga.ct.gov/2002/pridata/RptsAnnual/2002 Annual Recidivism Compliance.htm), whereas recidivism from the juvenile system has been calculated at 47% within 18 months ("State of Connecticut Juvenile Justice Programs: Recidivism Outcome Evaluation." Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, July 2002).

⁸ See Donna M. Bishop, "Juvenile Offenders in the Adult Criminal Justice System." Crime and Justice, 27: 140-146 (2000).

Juvenile Jurisdiction Implementation Team, "Report Pursuant to Public Act 03-257" (2004), available at www.cslib.org/agencies/JuvJust.pdf.

- > The Report is outdated and relies upon assumptions that may have inflated the estimated costs associated with the proposed change in age jurisdiction.
 - The Report incorrectly assumed that the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) is operating near capacity, requiring the construction of a \$20M facility to accommodate 150 youth transferred from the adult system. Perhaps due to its timing, the Report assumed that CJTS was operating near capacity and therefore estimated that youth transferred would need to have a new facility built for them, at an estimated cost of \$20 million. Since the Implementation Team report, however, Governor Rell has ordered the closing of CJTS by 2008, and a consensus group of over 50 stakeholders convened by DCF has recommended that CJTS be replaced with smaller, community-based facilities that current research indicates are the most cost-effective placement for this population. Placements for 16- and 17-year-olds within the more cost-effective Training, Rehabilitation, and Education Centers (TRECs) should cost less than the cost of housing the youth at CJTS or a proposed new \$20 million facility discussed by the the Implementation Team. Indeed, planning for these new TRECs based on the assumption that they will accommodate 16- and 17-year-olds (as needed) as well as youth now at CJTS will assure that our new correctional building projects are based on good practice. Moreover, the closing of CJTS will generate large, previously unanticipated savings. 11
 - The Report over-estimated capital expenditures or leasing costs of \$4.5M to build or lease courtroom space for 16 and 17 year old youth. Considering that Connecticut has managed to utilize existing courtroom space to process the 16 and 17 year old youth who benefit from the expanded YO status enacted in 2005, more creative solutions should be considered before resorting to the building of new courthouses. Much or all of this cost may be avoided should existing space be utilized while maintaining the sight and sound barriers necessary to separate juveniles and adults.
 - The Report overestimated the number of youth to be processed by the juvenile system because it does not account for the 16and 17-year-olds that will be transferred to the adult court according to automatic and discretionary juvenile
 transfers for class A, B, C & D felonies. Although the wisdom of Connecticut's transfer statutes may be
 subject to dispute, current law provides that the court shall automatically transfer from juvenile matters to
 the regular criminal docket of the Superior Court the case of any child charged with the commission of a
 capital felony, and a class A or B felony; upon motion of a juvenile prosecutor and order of the court,
 moreover, the case of any child charged with the commission of a class C or D felony or an unclassified
 felony shall be transferred from the docket for juvenile matters to the regular criminal docket of the
 Superior Court. C.G.S. § 46b-127. Based on point-in-time data from August 31, 2003, 22% of 16 and 17
 year-olds housed in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities were charged with Class A or B felonies
 and 62% with Class C and D felonies. Even assuming that the State's Attorney and the court would use
 their discretion to transfer not one youth charged with a class C or D felony to the adult court, the 22% of
 youth automatically transferred to the adult court and currently confined in adult facilities would likely
 remain there, and would therefore present no new burden on the juvenile system.

In addition to exaggerating potential costs, the Report grossly underestimates potential savings.

The Report almost completely discounts savings to the adult system associated with the removal of over 11,000 cases from its jurisdiction, based on 2002-03 admissions. It assumes no transfers of public defenders, attorneys from the Office of the State's Attorney, or Judicial Court Operations staff to juvenile venues and acknowledges very few cost savings to those offices. The Report does not consider cost savings associated with removal of youth from pretrial detention and does not discount post-adjudicatory incarceration costs in

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¹⁰ Darlene Dunbar, MSW, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families, "Voice, Choice & Hope: Juvenile Justice Consensus Document," January 20, 2006, available at http://www.ctjja.org/media/resources/resource-164.pdf.

¹¹ It is widely acknowledged that CJTS should never have been built, and the reasons for its construction have been associated with political corruption. Certainly, Connecticut's at-risk children and youth should not be asked to sacrifice appropriate treatment and care, nor should the people of Connecticut be asked to forfeit increased public safety, because of costs associated with replacing CJTS.

¹² As of August 31, 2003, 277 youth aged 16 or 17 years old were housed in DOC facilities. Of this total, 61 were charged with Class A or B felonies, 172 with Class C or D or unclassified felonies, and 44 with misdemeanors. ("OLR Research Report: Treatment of 16- and 17-year-old Offenders," March 1, 2004 (available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/2004/rpt/2004-R-0248.htm).

the juvenile system by costs saved in removing these youth from the adult system. Although more information is required to accurately forecast the savings that the removal of these cases will incur at each step of the system, the off-setting cost savings should, at least, include:

- O The cost of processing over 11,000 unique cases at the adult system's front door
- O The Division of Public Defender Services costs of representing approximately 11,000 youth per year (= approximately \$4,279,000 saved per year¹³)
- o The State's Attorney costs of prosecuting these youth
- O Pre-trial detention costs for approximately 140 youth per day, or 51,100 beds per year¹⁴
- O Incarceration costs for approximately 300 youth per day at \$73 per day (= \$21,900 saved per day; \$7,993,500 saved per year)¹⁵
- O Division of Probation costs of supervising approximately 4,000 youth in the community each year¹⁶

In other words, adding cases to the juvenile system means subtracting them from the adult system¹⁷:

16 and 17 year old youth	Subtracted from Adult System	Added to Juvenile System
Total cases at front door	11,435	11,435
# cases prosecuted	≥ 5,718	5,718
# cases handled by public defender	≥ 5,718	5,718
# detained pretrial per day	140	140
# incarcerated/committed	266/year ¹⁸	266/year
# under probation supervision	3,940	3,940

The Report fails to consider potential and significant future savings from decreased recidivism. Treating youth in the juvenile justice system should be viewed as an investment in our future. Research suggests that this change should yield significant long-term savings and benefits to society at large by reducing the number of youth who commit crimes subsequent to their first conviction. Youth treated in the juvenile justice system are provided with more and better mental health and counseling services than those in the criminal justice system¹⁹ and are offered more varied diversion and re-habilitation alternatives.²⁰ As a result, youth in the juvenile justice system are more likely to be rehabilitated and less likely to engage in criminal activity in the

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¹³ Cost savings to the Division of Public Defender Services (PDS) based on an estimated 11,000 16- and 17- year-olds represented per year at an average cost of \$389 per case ("OLR Research Report: Public Defenders," March 3, 2005 (available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/2005/rpt/2005-R-0273.htm). This assumes all 11,000 youth would be represented by PDS and would not retain private attorneys. More information is required to obtain a more precise estimate of cost savings.

¹⁴ According to the Juvenile Jurisdiction Implementation Team, approximately 140 youth per day require pretrial detention by the Department of Corrections (DOC).

¹⁵ As of August 31, 2003, 277 youth aged 16 or 17 years old were housed in DOC facilities (see fn 8, supra); the number of incarcerated youth had increased to 314 as of February 10, 2004, according to DOC's legislative liaison, Scott Semple. As of March 1, 2004, DOC spent \$72.90 per day on average to incarcerate a prisoner, regardless of age ("OLR Research Report: Treatment of 16- and 17-year old Offenders," March 1, 2004 (available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/2004/rpt/2004-R-0248.htm)). This conforms with the Implementation Team Report's assumption that all 16- and 17-year-olds currently in the adult system will be transferred to the juvenile system upon a change in age jurisdiction but does not account for automatic and discretionary juvenile transfers back to the adult system for class A, B, C & D felonies.

¹⁶ According to the report of the Juvenile Jurisdiction Implementation Team, approximately 3,940 youth in FY 02-03 were sentenced to some sort of probation supervision and assigned a probation officer.

¹⁷ All numbers are based on figures and estimates provided in the Juvenile Jurisdiction Implementation Team report.

¹⁸ This estimate is based upon the Implementation Team's estimate that 266 16- and 17-year-olds per year would need to be committed to CJTS if moved from the adult to juvenile justice systems. We do not know how many of these youth are currently incarcerated per year in the adult system. Additional data is necessary to make an accurate estimate. There is reason to believe, based on the average number of 16- and 17-year-olds currently incarcerated per day (nee in 14, supra) that the number of 16- and 17-year-olds removed from adult secure facilities would be greater than 266 per year.

^{19 &}quot;Mental Health Treatment for youth in the Juvenile Justice System." National Mental Health Association, 2004.

²⁰ In CT a variety of diversion and treatment alternatives are offered for children, including Juvenile Review Boards and Teen Courts. Additionally, the Office of Alternative Sanctions and Youth Service Bureaus exist to further these efforts.

future.²¹ The savings that accrue to the criminal justice system and to society from this investment in youth rehabilitation are calculable, but the data necessary to accurately perform such a calculation has been difficult for us to obtain. The larger social benefits of successful rehabilitation and treatment, though not easily quantifiable, are easy to imagine and appreciate. Eliminating the debilitating burden that a prior adult conviction presents to the vast numbers of young 16 and 17 year olds released from the adult criminal justice system alone would bestow tremendous benefits on families and workforce productivity.²² Unfortunately, neither the more narrow, quantifiable savings associated with reduced recidivism nor the more general social benefits pursuant to the proposed change in the juvenile jurisdiction age are contemplated in the Implementation Team Report.

The Report fails to account for current proposals that promote efficiency in the juvenile justice system and reduce the cost of treatment for youth. The Report treats the juvenile justice system as a static system without considering proposals – like the replacement of CJTS with the more cost-effective TRECs – that are currently under consideration by the General Assembly and could easily decrease the cost of treatment per youth. That the juvenile justice system is currently transitioning from a residential to community-based care model suggests also that the amount spent by Connecticut per youth in the juvenile justice system will soon be far lower than that predicted by the Implementation Team. Downsizing large, centralized facilities—i.e., replacing them with a system of smaller, community-based or regional facilities that are part of a full continuum of sanctions and services—is likely to produce substantial immediate and long-term savings in the form of lower construction costs, lower operating costs and reduced recidivism.²³ In addition, Medicaid reimbursement, which is not available when children are in secure correctional facilities, should be available for all eligible children under 18 in community-based care.

Given the compelling moral, ethical and practical mandates for raising the age of jurisdiction of the juvenile court to 18 and the flaws with the Implementation Team's Report, we would urge this Committee to unanimously pass S.B. 5782, and begin work now with executive and judicial staff and those outside state government with expertise in this area to identify the most expeditious and cost-effective ways to implement this change. We suggest that this planning process incorporate at least five components: a) Data analysis to understand the make-up and pathways of 16- and 17- year-olds now involved with the adult system and youth currently involved with the juvenile system; b) Intensive case file review of a sample of these youth to determine programmatic needs associated with the jurisdictional change based on best practices in corrections, rather than current practices; c) Facility review to determine space needs and potential utilization of existing spaces based on the case-file review's estimates of service, program and bed needs; d) Staffing review and service review (also based on the case-file review); and e) Financial review and calculation of total costs, savings, and potential revenue sources. There is ample time under the bill as drafted to allow the careful planning that is essential to make this change in juvenile court jurisdiction a success for the affected children and for Connecticut society as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

²¹ See fn. 5, supra.

²² Many youth who are incarcerated never complete high school, which imposes a significant cost to our economy in terms of lost productivity, wages and taxes. A recent study estimated that the lifetime difference in income between a high school graduate and a dropout is about \$260,000. The study estimated that with 9,297 Connecticut youth who started high school in 2001 and did not graduate in 2004, our state lost \$2,417,220,000 in terms of their lost wages. ("High School Dropouts Cost the U.S. Billions in Lost Wages and Taxes, According to Alliance for Excellent Education" (press release, March 1, 2006) available at http://all4ed.org/press/pr-022806.html)

²³ R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington, eds. Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, 1998, at 313-345, cited in Shelley Zavlek, "Planning Community-Based Facilities for Violent Juvenile Offenders as Part of a System of Graduated Sanctions," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, August 2005, at 7.