

# State of Connecticut

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY



### COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Judicial Committee  
Public Hearing  
March 13, 2006

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee. My name is Elizabeth C. Brown and I am here to testify in favor of Raised Bill No. 5782, "An Act Concerning the Age of a Child For Purposed of Jurisdiction in delinquency Matters and Proceedings.

#### **What the Bill Would Do?**

The bill before you recognizes that the social, emotional and cognitive development of youth ages 16 and 17 years old is distinct from adults. CT, NY and NC are the only states in the nation that treat 16 and 17 year olds as adults in the criminal justice system. Research indicates that holding minors responsible for adult crimes only presumes that "they have a level of moral judgment and rational reasoning they simply do not yet have."<sup>1</sup>

For the past several years, Connecticut has seen a serious debate about the process of dealing with young people who get into trouble with the law. This debate is taking place in the context of the overall decline in arrests of young people both for all crimes and for violent crimes, including children fewer than 16 and in the larger under 18 age group. The number of young people in the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and in the State's correctional facilities also has declined. Alternatively, referrals to juvenile court and total detention admissions have both increased during the past decade.<sup>2</sup>

I had the honor to serve on the Juvenile Justice Task Force two years ago, chaired by Judge Michael Mack regarding the cost of implementing the transition of 16 and 17 year olds to the Juvenile Court. overarching discussion centered on the funds to make this transition. Calculations were based on the question, **what would it take to duplicate the current juvenile system to deal with 16 and 17 year olds.** The figure, including almost \$50 million for new facilities, reached a high of \$80 million dollars to accomplish this

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Brock, Children's Competence for Health Care decision-making in Children and Health Care: Moral and Social Issues.

<sup>2</sup> Social State of Conencticut, 2005 (released February'06)

- **Racial Disparities-** Studies in 1995, 2001 and most recently 2003 show an ongoing, systemic problem of minority youth in the juvenile system.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission hopes this bill will move forward, and this Committee will fashion a comprehensive approach to juvenile justice in Connecticut to address the persistent, systematic problems that leave so many youth in Connecticut with little hope for a successful future.

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<sup>3</sup> Social State of CT, 2005