

Greetings Honorable Senators and Representatives. My name is Erin Joudrey. I am a student at UCONN where I am working towards my Masters in Social Work. In addition I work for Klingberg Family Centers, a non-profit agency that serves children and families. I am here to testify on Bill No. 5782, an Act Concerning the Age of a Child for Purposes of Jurisdiction in Delinquency Matters and Proceedings. I am in support of this legislation and I hope that you will also support it.

Over the past eight years I have worked with families and youth in a variety of settings. I have worked as a Child Development Specialist at a Residential Facility, as an In-Home Family Preservation and Reunification Therapist and I currently work as a Social Worker in a Therapeutic Foster Care Program. The common thread in each of these positions is that the youth I work with have all endured physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse and neglect. Many of these youth have also witnessed domestic violence, inappropriate sexual acts, substance abuse, and some instances have witnessed the death of a parent. As a result of the unspeakable acts they have been subjected to many of them have developed maladaptive coping skills as a way to survive. An example of such a child is Anna whom I have known for the past eight years.

When Anna's mother was six months pregnant she suffered a traumatic brain injury. This injury led Anna's mother to become abusive and homicidal towards her children. As a result she gave Anna to a family friend who adopted her at the age of two. When Anna was eight years old her adoptive mother passed away. Since then Anna has been hospitalized three times, has lived in two residential treatment facilities, three shelters, and has lived in nine foster homes. Anna has been exposed to multiple and inconsistent caregivers and to abuse and neglect in some of these placements.

Over the years Anna has developed serious mental health and behavioral issues. Anna is diagnosed with ADHD and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. In her last foster home, Anna engaged in a physical altercation with another foster child. Both girls assaulted one another but because Anna was seventeen she was the only one arrested. Anna was taken to the Hartford Police Department where she remained in a holding cell for twenty four hours. When Anna was released it was clear that she had been significantly traumatized by the experience. She spoke for days about the experience and the women that she was exposed to. The experience did not "teach her a lesson". It only served to further impact her already existing mental health issues. Anna is a bright and articulate young woman who loves to write her own lyrics. She aspires to go to college and become a police officer. This dream could have been cut short if the judge had decided to send her to prison for assault.

In summary, over 50% of the children and youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health needs. I implore you to provide these youth with appropriate and responsive community-based services rather than put them into adult prison.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony. I appreciate your time and attention. I would be happy to try and answer any questions that you may have regarding my testimony.