

**Testimony provided by Joanne Davidson**  
**March 13, 2006**  
**Supporting H.B. 5782**

Our 17 year old daughter is incarcerated at York Correctional Institution in Niantic, CT. She has been addicted to heroin for almost a year, and resorted to stealing in order to support her habit. She stole CD's, DVDs, and tools from our household, and also entered a neighbor's house and stole a variety of items to sell in order to get money to buy heroin. She was seen leaving the neighbor's house, was accused, confessed and gave information to the police whereby they were able to recover most of the stolen items.

Since then, she has been in a 4 day detox, then an intensive outpatient program. She continued to use and was placed in an inpatient substance abuse program, then referred back to the outpatient program. She was unable to maintain sobriety and went through this process three times. We were unable to get her into a long-term treatment program because our insurance wouldn't pay for it and we couldn't afford to pay for it ourselves. We were advised by our attorney that the only way to get her into a long-term treatment program was through the courts.

When she took our car without permission, we allowed her to be arrested and incarcerated, believing that it was the only way to keep her safe and to get her referred into long-term treatment. We had no idea what kind of an environment we were putting our daughter into.

She was incarcerated on a Monday at York Correctional Institution, the only facility for female adolescents in the state of CT, and a 2 1/2 hour ride from our home. She was allowed to call me, her mother, the next day. I wasn't able to speak to her again until the Thursday of the following week when we had our 1/2 hour courtesy visit, through glass, talking on a telephone. We were not allowed to bring her anything, no clothes, books, toiletries. We are not allowed to visit again until we are "approved" by the DOC. We applied more than 2 weeks ago and have heard nothing.

After that visit, we started getting heartbreaking letters about how awful it was in prison. She had to wear the same clothes for 17 days and was not given soap or shampoo because she had to be in court on the day they were given out. When we saw her in court we were not allowed to touch her or speak with her. I called the prison and spoke with her counselor, who said that if my daughter was old enough to have done whatever it was that got her incarcerated, she was old enough to fend for herself. She should be able to ask for what she needed, or turn to the other inmates for help. She's a 17 year old, depressed drug addict who has never been in prison before and was terrified of the other inmates and had no idea what to ask for or who to ask. My daughter told me that after I had spoken to the counselor, her counselor told her not to tell her mother things that would make me think the prison staff wasn't doing their jobs!

She is housed in a section of the prison that also houses the highest security adult women, and although the cells are on separate tiers, they do mingle when they go for meals. Fights are frequent. The state requires that adolescents receive schooling, but my daughter was at York for 3 weeks before she was even tested for placement in school, and attended her first

class on the 4 week anniversary of her incarceration. Before that she was unable to visit the library because she was not in school. She was not able to attend church services because our denomination isn't represented. She sees a psychiatrist once every 2 weeks. She wasn't able to call us because the DOC uses MCI, and since the calls from the prison are collect, you have to have an account with MCI to accept them. No one explained that to us, so it took awhile to figure it out on our own. We wrote letters, and it took 9 days for the first ones to be delivered, although our daughter's letters to us took only 2 days. She felt completely abandoned and isolated for nearly 2 weeks before we could get any regular communication established.

All we wanted was to keep our daughter safe, and because we are not wealthy, we had no alternative but the prison system. She has not been convicted of anything but is treated no differently than those who have. We believe very strongly that 16 and 17 year olds cannot receive the attention and care that they need if they are incarcerated with adult prisoners. They are not able to fend for themselves and it is not in their best interest to be housed in that environment.

We have been trying to do what's best for our child. Parents need help; adolescents need help. Surely this wealthy state can come up with a better answer than incarceration in adult prison. Please pass H.B. 5782. Thank you.