



Family Services Working to Strengthen our Communities

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FSW TESTIMONY HOUSE BILL 5782 JUDICIARY COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING MARCH 13, 2006

Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Mark Chudwick and I am here today representing FSW, a private nonprofit human services organization that has served the Greater Bridgeport area for more than 150 years. I am here to voice my agency's support of House Bill 5782, to raise the age for juvenile justice jurisdiction.

We believe that it is patently unfair for most youngsters under the age of 18 years to be included in the adult court system. For the past 13 years, FSW has operated a program under the auspices of the Department of Children and Families to help young people in the juvenile justice system re-assimilate into the communities in which they live. Last year, our case managers worked with about a hundred youngsters and their families to make their return to their communities as smooth as possible. As you might imagine, these young people face a variety of obstacles in their lives and supervising their return requires constant vigilance on the part of FSW staff members.

Many of the young people supervised by our staff are in the 16 to 17 year old age group that is currently under the jurisdiction of the adult prison system. As our case managers would tell you if they were able to be here today, these young people face enough challenges and obstacles in their lives without having to be exposed to the grim reality of the adult prison system. The current system does not help to turn the lives of these young people around. It is, in fact, punitive and destructive in its nature, reinforcing negative attitudes and actions.

If, indeed, it is the objective of our juvenile justice system to help our young people deal with the immediate crises in their lives and to find a way to become productive members of our society, then we need to give them every chance to do so.

We at FSW urge the committee to pass House Bill 5782 so that we have a better chance at saving more of the 16 and 17 year olds that we all count on to help create better futures for us all.

Thank you.