

Date: 3/12/07

Bill Number: 7359

**TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 7359
AN ACT CONCERNING A GRANT PROGRAM TO COMBAT TRUANCY**

March 12, 2007

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. The Center initiated the Truancy Court Prevention Project (TCPP), a unique collaborative venture with the Village for Children and Families, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), and the Connecticut Judicial Department. Through the program, eighth and ninth graders at Hartford Public High School and Quirk Middle School participate in weekly court sessions held at school where a judge, who presides in an unofficial capacity, reviews students' attendance and academic progress. Currently, Supreme Court Justice Richard Palmer, Appellate Court Judge Douglas Lavine, and Superior Court Judge Curtissa Cofield volunteer as the TCPP's judges. The TCPP also delivers legal and case management services to ensure students' completion of high school.

As a result of our participation in this project, we have witnessed first-hand how truancy is linked to a host of negative outcomes, including dropout and juvenile delinquency. We see how truancy often masks a myriad of other problems in the lives of the youth in our project, including learning disabilities, mental health issues, safety concerns at home or at school, and poverty. These at-risk young people suffer from a severe lack of services.

We strongly support the passage of Bill No. 7359 for the following reasons. First, the Bill specifically targets the five school districts with the highest dropout rates. There are several bills before you this legislative session to divert Families with Service Needs cases away from the court system. (See Bill No. 5576 and Bill No. 5676.) Fifty-one percent of these cases are truant youth, and most of them come from our four largest school districts. If Connecticut wants to begin to address the truancy epidemic, it needs to start where the problem is the worst.

Second, the legislation, if passed, would ask districts to employ research based methods in the areas of discipline and reading instruction. In order to be effective, programs must rely on interventions that have already proven effective after undergoing rigorous evaluation. We see many of the youth in our truancy project who have been socially promoted year after year after year, and whose reading levels are years behind grade level, causing them to give up and stay away from school.

Third, in providing supports in academics, the Bill recognizes the growing body of research that links academic struggle with truancy. Youth who were ending



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up in the juvenile justice system because of truancy but who were clearly struggling in school were the impetus for the creation of the TCPP. (See attached sample report card of TCPP participant.) It is undeniable that poor attendance has a negative effect on academic performance. However, our project, with the assistance of our educational consultant, discovered that many of our truant youth had learning difficulties that went unrecognized since elementary school. As our report, "Truancy: A Closer Look"¹ explains, most of the youth in the TCPP demonstrated early warning signs, such as failing grades, multiple retentions, and very low academic achievement, but received few interventions. As a result, these learning problems produced a downward spiral of discouragement that prompted children to avoid school. Absenteeism, in turn, made it less likely that the child would succeed and so made coming to school an even more unpleasant prospect.

This bill proposes delivering academic support to these students in a variety of ways, including after school programs, tutoring and summer school. The bill also provides funds for the establishment or enhancement of research-based reading instruction. Too many of the TCPP's participants, who are 8th or 9th graders, read on a first or second grade level. Without basic reading skills, these children will not master high school curricula and have little chance of obtaining a decent-paying job. Finally, the Bill proscribes for the provision of in-school alternative educational initiatives for truant youth. As mentioned, because of their difficulty with learning, many truant youth need to learn in smaller environments with teachers who can teach to their unique learning styles.

Fourth, the legislation recognizes recent research that links suspension and expulsion with truancy and dropout. The Bill aims to decrease suspension and expulsion rates by proscribing the implementation of research-based school wide positive discipline policies and practices. The overuse of suspension creates a climate where truant youth, who are already disengaged from school, feel more alienated and fall further behind in their course work. Suspensions further disconnect already disengaged youth and encourage youth who are vacillating between school and dropout to drop out.

Finally, the Bill shows foresight in that it focuses on early intervention by providing programs to parents of truant elementary school students. Research suggests that patterns of absenteeism can be detected as early as third grade. In fact, our report showed that twenty-six percent of our sample exhibited patterns of absenteeism as early as kindergarten and first grade, with one of our students missing more than 2 full years of schooling by the 8th grade. By intervening early, a difference can be made in terms of parenting styles and a child can avoid missing early schooling, which serves as the foundation for later academic success.

In closing, we respectfully suggest that, if this Bill is enacted, it includes a provision regarding data collection and evaluation so that Connecticut can begin to see

¹ The Center for Children's Advocacy report, "Truancy: A Closer Look," can be found at the Center for Children's Advocacy homepage at www.kidscounsel.org or at <http://www.kidscounsel.org/final%20truancy%20report%20dec%2020%2006.pdf>.

what works best for its students and replicate those effective interventions throughout the State.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge you to pass Bill No. 7359, An Act Concerning a Grant Program to Combat Truancy. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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2003-2004

19 19 School Year

REPORT CARD • GRADES 7-8

ID# _____

Name _____

Grade 8

Cluster Q9 D.O.B _____

Homeroom Teacher Ms. A. Medina

Room 506

Special Needs Program _____

MARKING PERIODS

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ENGLISH	F	D-	F	F	F
Skill Level					
Conduct					
Homework					
Conference Requested					

Teacher's Name: Medina

Comment 4
 I know you have much more to give. Better luck next year. Have a great summer!

Comment 1: Too many days out missis assignments
 Comment 2: Too much uncompleted work! could do better!
 Comment 3: Too many assignments missing!

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
GENERAL MATH/ PRE-ALGEBRA	F	F	F	F	F
Skill Level					
Conduct					
Homework					
Conference Requested					

Teacher's Name: Ms. Vu

Comment 4
 Have a good summer. Good luck.

Comment 1: Absences Missing work
 Comment 2: Very little work
 Comment 3: Attendance

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
READING/ FOREIGN LANG	F	D-	F	F	F
Skill Level					
Conduct					
Homework					
Conference Requested					

Teacher's Name: Ms Lewis

Comment 4
 No wares! Have a great summer!

Comment 1: Missing work absences
 Comment 2: Very little work
 Comment 3: No work

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
PHYSICAL/LIFE SCIENCE	F	F	F	F	F
Skill Level					
Conduct					
Homework					
Conference Requested					

Teacher's Name: Ms Bonvie

Comment 4
 Good luck in the future.

Comment 1: Missing work
 Comment 2: Missing work little effort!
 Comment 3: missing work can do better

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
GEOGRAPHY/HISTORY	D	DF	D	F	D
Skill Level					
Conduct					
Homework					
Conference Requested					

Teacher's Name: _____

Comment 4
 Have a great summer!

Comment 1: Missing work
 Comment 2: Little effort
 Comment 3: Missing work

ART/MUSIC	1	2	3	TECH.ED/FCS	1	2	3	PHYSICAL ED/HEALTH	1	2	3
Music History	F ²			Tech.Ed.- Manuf./Power		D ²		Physical Education I			F ²
Music Theory	B ⁺			Tech.Ed.- Exp Tech I		B ¹		Physical Education II			F ²
Orchestral Development	F ²			Tech.Ed.- Exp. Tech II				Physical Education III			
Instrumental Music (Band)				Family & Consumer Sciences				Swimming			NE
Art - 3-D Design		B ⁺		FCS - C.H.E.C	F ²			Health Ed.			F ²
Art - 2-D Design		B ⁺		FCS - Foods		C ¹					
Art - Draw Paint		A ¹		FCS - Sewing	F ³						

2-23 in danger of being retained after

	1	2	3	4	Total
Days Absent	6	8	6	29	44
Times Late	3	2	1	9	45
Suspensions	0	0	0	10	10

Grade	Explanation
A - 90-100	Excellent
B - 80-89	Good
C - 70-79	Fair
D - 60-69	Poor
F - Below 60	Failure

Conduct	RETENTION NOTICE SENT:
1 - Outstanding	
2 - Acceptable	ASSIGNED IN JUNE TO GRADE
3 - Poor	
4 - Used only when applicable	

Community Service Hours _____
 Support Services (Speech/SSW) _____