

**TESTIMONY OF HECTOR GLYNN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE**

**PUBLIC HEARING
APRIL 4, 2007**

**IN FAVOR OF RAISED HOUSE BILL NO. 5676
AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN OF FAMILIES WITH SERVICE NEEDS**

I am Hector Glynn and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance fully supports H.B. 5676: An Act concerning Family Support Centers for Children of Families with Service Needs.

These bills come out of the recommendation of the Family With Service Needs Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee, legislatively created last spring, was to research and determine how to respond to those children who fall under the category of Family with Service Needs, when they can no longer legally be put in a locked secure facility for violating probation. The committee brought together legislators, judges, various child advocacy groups, DCF and CSSD and decided that instead of focusing only on what to do with kids who ended up at the very back end of the system, it would look at what changes could be made to significantly reduce the number of kids who needed deep end services. The Alliance was a part of the FWSN Advisory Committee and it **strongly supports Bill No. 5676 an Act Concerning Children of Families with Service Needs.**

Presently, status offenses are one gateway to juvenile justice involvement. In Fiscal Year 2005, 906 FWSN children with ongoing specific needs were at high risk of more court involvement, and of these, 300 FWSN children were placed in detention for violating court orders – thereby entering the delinquency side of the courts. Instituting new procedures and a continuum of services for this population as an alternative to incarceration will stem the numbers of youth entering deeper into the juvenile justice system.¹

Family Support Centers will offer critical treatment options to at least 900 at-risk youth and their families on a voluntary basis, without the filing of a Family with Service Needs petition. This will allow the family and child to complete the first stages of change in a supportive environment and divert them from the court system. For most families, these interventions will succeed. If a child is not successful, then a Family With Service Needs petition could be filed. However, the more children and families we can serve outside of the court system the better it is for the families and for the state. Providing comprehensive services and supports is much cheaper than juvenile detention or residential treatment. Vanderbilt professor Mark A.

¹ See Tina Chiu and Sara Mogulescu, Changing the Status Quo for Status Offenders: New York State's Efforts to Support Troubled Teens, Vera Institute for Justice (December 2004), available at http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/253_496.pdf

Cohen found that preventing a teen from adopting an adult life of crime could save the country between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million over a lifetime.

Family Support Centers would provide many unique opportunities for at-risk youth to receive crucial services, including:

- screening and assessment at the initial stage of the process,
- immediate crisis intervention—available on a 24-hour basis,
- mediation,
- educational advocacy,
- community-based mental health treatment (including trauma treatment),
- pro-social activities, and
- short-term respite beds for boys and girls.

The Governor's budget allocated funds for four Family Support Centers: in Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury. The plan endorsed by the FWSN Advisory Board also provides for a year two rollout of six additional Centers: in New Britain, Waterford, Middletown, and joint Centers serving Willimantic/Rockville, Torrington/Danbury, and Stamford/Norwalk. Unfortunately, funding for these Centers is not presently included in the Governor's budget. **Because the rapid-response, community-based model would work best if the Centers serve all geographic areas of the state, we strongly urge you to add funding for these six Centers in year two and include language within the bill that would allow all qualified entities to apply for the grants.**

The Connecticut Juvenile Justice system strongly supports early intervention, prevention and diversion models. Connecticut has the opportunity to progressively address status offenders by identifying and meeting their needs early and quickly, thereby reducing the number of children who end up in the juvenile justice system.