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Child
Advocacy
Coalition

"Mobilizing on Behalf of Children"

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Testimony

of the

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

Submitted to the

Judiciary Committee

Friday, February 23, 2007

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, BCAC, is a coalition of 82 member organizations. Our members represent a broad range of agencies including community centers, counseling organizations, early childhood programs, health centers, hospitals, churches and synagogues, and parent and civic organizations. BCAC is the largest coalition in Southwest Connecticut and its program combines research, community planning, advocacy, community education and mobilization to ensure that children grow up healthy, safe and receive the education and skills to reach their full potential.

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition and its 82 member organizations urge you to support **HB 7084 AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN URBAN VIOLENCE REDUCTION GRANT PROGRAM.** HB 7084 would grant \$750,000 to the cities of Bridgeport, Hartford and New haven respectively to address the problem of urban violence that plagues inner cities. HB 7084 would provide grants to programs serving youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen and which include 1) mentoring 2) tutoring and enrichment activities 3) social and cultural activities 4) athletic and recreational opportunities as well as 5) training in problem-solving, decision making, conflict resolution, peer counseling and similar topics designed to reduce youth violence.

Foremost we applaud the fact that HB 7084 specifically targets youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen years of age. This age range constitutes the group of children which are primarily exposed to urban violence and the juvenile justice system.

Prior to proceeding, it is critical to emphasize that there is no one bullet method in reducing youth violence. Instead, any effective preventative strategy in reducing youth violence is one that has a dual focus of not only targeting violent behavior but even more importantly focusing on creating developmentally healthy youth.

HB 7084 provides funding for all the services which research has shown to be related to positive healthy development in youth.

HB 7084 requires for programs to provide:

- 1) **Mentoring** – Research abounds in the link between resilient youth in at-risk environments and a positive adult mentor. At-risk youth who “beat the odds” often identify a nurturing relationship with a teacher, parent, relative, or coach.
- 2) **Tutoring and enrichment activities** – Any child who is successful at learning is more likely to develop a positive sense of competence and self worth. Academic achievement is perhaps one of the strongest measures by which youth measure their degree of competence.
- 3) **Social and cultural activities** – Research has documented the relationship between social engagement and positive self-esteem. Engagement in cultural activities promotes a sense of pride in one’s cultural group and enhances self-esteem.
- 4) **Athletic and recreational opportunities** – Again, research has demonstrated the positive link between athletics/recreational opportunities and self-esteem, as well as functioning as a mechanism by which to relieve stress, a major precursor to violent activity.
- 5) **Training in problem-solving, decision making, conflict resolution, peer counseling and similar topics designed to reduce youth violence** – Research has shown the positive link between programs that enhance cognitive thinking strategies and reductions in antisocial behavior.

BCAC supports HB 7084, however, we would ask the committee to include requirements for accountability and state oversight of how these funds are used. With this addition, we enthusiastically support HB 7084. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.