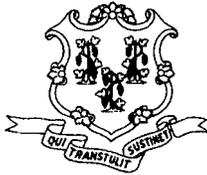


State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing
February 23, 2007
Testimony Submitted by
Elizabeth C. Brown

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee. My name is Elizabeth C. Brown and I am here to testify on RIB 7084, An Act Establishing an Urban Violence Reduction Grant Program.

The bill targets Connecticut's largest cities with a history of gang violence and seeks to assist communities to provide services to youth at risk for gang involvement, academic failure, health and mental health issues that negatively impact a young person's ability to achieve adulthood with the skills and inner resources for successful adulthood.

The Commission has the honor of serving on the Youth Futures Committee established last year to develop a comprehensive approach to ensure positive youth development. The Committee is led by the Office of Workforce Development and consists of pertinent state agencies, legislators, and members of Youth Service Bureaus and other public members. The goal is to work across state agencies in partnership with local communities to achieve a set of common outcomes for our young people. In addition, we hope to leverage existing resources and create a youth service system that holds all of us accountable for results.

The Commission recommends that the Youth Futures Committee serve as the coordinating entity in conjunction with the Office of Policy and Management who is a member of the Youth Futures Committee in administering the grant. Linking it to the broader work of the Committee will provide a structure on the state level to work with the communities and leverage resources to avoid duplication and reinventing the "wheel."

Currently a team of state agencies- the Youth Vision Team- has developed a common RFP for a program in New Haven helping young people transitioning to adulthood. This common approach has led to better coordination and sharing of what is working among state agencies. Local communities have come together to plan and target resources as a community instead of the competing for scarce dollars.

Grantees of the Urban Violence Grant would report to the Youth Futures Committee and be able to share findings and report on progress in reducing violence, gang involvement but, also how are the youth progressing in school, with their peers, families and communities.

This would establish a new paradigm for doing business in Connecticut. Breaking down the silos we constantly talk about. All state agencies would be involved with working with the community and a consensus would be developed on how to best address the systemic problems in these cities in Connecticut. Instead of thinking about a grant program, we need to think about helping communities build “assets” in the community that foster positive youth development. The critical question to ask is: what are the assets in this community, and how can all stakeholders in the community build more assets for all youth to succeed.

Research from the National Crime Prevention Council reveals that the best way to embed “protective factors” in a community is through a concerted local effort. I recommend the following components be part to the new paradigm shift:

1. The Urban Violence Grant shall explicitly seek to decrease gang participation and gang violence and foster positive youth development; provide community based services that are research based and or identified as a promising practice; foster meaningful relationships with family, school, and community; and increase opportunities for youth leadership; civic engagement, academic success, employment and other types of activities that build life skills and job readiness.
2. Grantees shall establish a local Urban Violence Task Force co-chaired by the Chief of Police and the Chief Elected Official with the following membership: the school superintendent or his/her designee; the Youth Service Bureau; non-profits serving children and youth; youth, local or regional Health Director or designee; school social worker; school psychologist; school principal; health professionals, including a school nurse; neighborhood representatives; parents; and representatives of the business communities; representatives of the faith community; Juvenile Court Services; local Probate Judge and other representatives deemed appropriate.
3. The grantees, through the Task Force, shall convene and develop a plan to for primary prevention and early intervention including after school and anti-bullying programs that protect students from gang violence and remove the pressures to join gangs; interventions to steer youth at high risk for violent behavior away from violence and back into school or a job with greater supervision; provide proven programs that help families keep other siblings from joining gangs and identify for services violent and chronic juvenile offenders. Such plan shall identify effective research based practices; establish measurable goals and benchmarks and demonstrate collaboration among police, social services and other community partners to better coordinate, leverage resources and deliver appropriate services. The Task Force shall report its progress in meeting the goals in Section 1 to the Youth Futures Committee established pursuant to PA 06-182.

4. The Office of Policy and Management in conjunction with the Youth Futures Committee shall:

- 1) Review the local plans and offer advice and target resources if applicable to the implementation of the local youth plan developed
- 2) Identify state, regional and local organizations upon which grantees could draw for assistance with specific issues, or complexes of issues and suggest ways of linking to broader policy discussions,
- 3) Shall convene the grantees twice a year to encourage a dialogue on what is working;
- 4) Make recommendations for institutional changes, public policy and budget priorities to the General Assembly having cognizance related matters of children, education, and appropriations.
- 5) Link to other state initiatives in the Juvenile Justice System. Both DOFF and Court Support Services both serve on the Youth Futures Committee.

The Commission is very excited about this opportunity to put in place a more comprehensive approach to addressing the persistent, systematic issues in our poorest communities to ensure every youth has a brighter future in Connecticut.