



City of New Britain

New Britain, Connecticut 06051

*"New Britain:
A City for
All People"*

April 4, 2007

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Bill # 5676. My name is Christopher Montes. I represent the City of New Britain's Youth & Family Services as well as the Connecticut Youth Services Association, the network of 99 Youth Service Bureaus serving 129 cities and towns across the state of Connecticut.

Today, I am testifying in support of **Proposed Bill No. 5676, AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN OF FAMILIES WITH SERVICE NEEDS.**

As a professional in the field of service to youth and families for 26 years, 19 in my current capacity in the City of New Britain, I am in full agreement that FWSN children and youth need community based services and diversion programs that will keep them out of the Juvenile Court System and subsequent lock up. I have witnessed countless occasions where services delivered to FWSN youth have meant the difference between a change in behavior and a change in residence; that residence being a locked facility meant for those with criminally aberrant behavior.

New Britain, like other cities statewide, shares a burden of FWSN behavior children and youth that are severely at risk for shifting from status offenses to more criminogenic activities such as substance abuse and drug sales, gang-like violence, robbery, larceny, and a host of other harmful and illegal acts. In our organization, we have implemented an intervention and diversion program not unlike the Family Support Center concept as stated in Bill 5676 Sec. 2(b). Rather than going to court, FWSN children and youth may now be referred to our Juvenile Review Board whereby we provide complete assessment of individual, school, home, and community functioning. After hearing the case, recommendations are then made by the Juvenile Review Board, usually resulting in individual and family counseling, structured recreational programs, referral and collaboration with other community based programs, or more intensive support such as our System of Care and its case management services that are operated by New Britain Youth and Family Services. Such services are confidential and meant to provide the young person with the exact services he or she needs. Moreover, each case is handled individually, with respect to the family's input and capabilities.

While time consuming, I believe it is the role of New Britain Youth and Family Services and its Youth Service Bureau. Under the existing **State Statute Sec. 10-19m**, Youth Service Bureaus are statutorily charged with the responsibility to provide “evaluation, planning, coordination, and implementation of services, including prevention and intervention programs for delinquent, predelinquent, pregnant, parenting and troubled youth referred to such bureaus by schools, police, juvenile courts, adult courts, parents, and self referrals. A Youth Service Bureau shall be the coordinating unit of community-based services to provide comprehensive delivery of prevention, intervention, treatment, and follow-up services ... such services shall be designed to meet the needs of youth by the diversion of troubled youth from the juvenile justice system....” In a nutshell, Youth Service Bureaus are already doing Family Support Center work as they are the hub in the wheel of services in each local community

Therefore, I respectfully request that when considering bill 5676, the Judiciary Committee take into account existing Youth Service Bureaus throughout the state in accordance with the aforementioned statute that is already in place. However, please be aware that current language of the proposed bill excludes nearly all of the state’s Youth Service Bureaus as they are not “private providers”.

Consequently, in conditional support of the establishment of Family Support Centers for FWSN behavior children and youth, I ask that you please consider proposed language revision in bill 5676 to include Youth Service Bureaus by amending the first sentence of Sec. 2(b) as follows: “The Court Support Services Division shall contract with private providers, **private nonprofit, or municipally operated youth service bureaus with active juvenile review boards** to develop a network of family support centers to serve families with service needs.” This will allow for a fair RFP process as well as statutory continuity of the role of the Youth Service Bureau as the “coordinating unit” in each local community.

The framework for Family Support Centers already exists, and for cities like New Britain, Youth Service Bureaus are prepared to take on additional FWSN cases as funds are made available to meet the various and complex needs of FWSN youth. Moreover, let me say there is no need to re-create the wheel, just add more spokes to sure it up.

Thank You,



Christopher L. Montes, M.A., N.C.P., F.D.C.
Administrator of Community Services Division, City of New Britain
At Large Board Representative, Connecticut Youth Services Association