



DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
TESTIMONY
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 23, 2007



H.B. No. 7151 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CLOSURE OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL TRAINING, REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION CENTERS

The Department of Children and Families offers the following comments regarding H.B. No. 7151 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CLOSURE OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL TRAINING, REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION CENTERS.

The Department appreciates that this legislation advances the dialogue going about the benefits of smaller regional facilities as opposed to large congregate care facilities.

Over the past two years the Department, with the support of the General Assembly, has focused on the development of community services for children in the juvenile justice system. Services that have been developed and implemented include Functional Family Therapy, STEP educational transitioning, and Boys and Girls Club Targeted Re-Entry Program. These services begin the development of a comprehensive community service delivery system that will better meet the needs of the kids who are on parole and at home. They will also be critical as the Department ends its primary reliance on the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) and Parole Services, and moves toward a comprehensive spectrum of services for children committed delinquent that includes smaller, community-based Treatment, Reintegration and Education Centers.

In 2005, the Governor called for the closing of CJTS. This year, the Governor is again supporting \$5 million in capital funds to begin development of Treatment, Reintegration and Education Centers (TREC)s. These centers would serve to replace the State's capacity at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School for secure treatment for boys committed delinquent. In the summer and fall of 2005, a group of over 50 stakeholders met and developed a report entitled "*Voice, Choice & Hope: Juvenile Justice Consensus Document.*" The group first highlighted the issues confronting CJTS and then identified several consensus principles that include:

- Before constructing new facilities, appropriate community services must be in place.
- DCF and partners should initially pilot such services in one area to determine their effectiveness.
- TREC)s should focus on education, literacy, treatment, life/social skills, employment and reintegration.
- Community services must begin in the TREC)s and continue once a child is released home.
- Case management practices must be based upon a relational vs. correctional model.

The group then reached consensus that regionalized, smaller, secure, state-operated TREC)s would have no more than 24 beds in each of 3 or 4 facilities, depending on geographic need. The group also agreed that each TREC would house a school, clinical services, rehabilitation services, secure residence and recreation areas. There was recognition that careful consideration be paid to the design of these facilities with the focus being the creation of an environment that is conducive to treatment, education, rehabilitation as well as being inviting to families and the local communities. Security features that dominate CJTS should be more subtly integrated into the physical design. Other considerations should

include the use of natural lighting, complimenting the immediate vicinity of the facilities, adequate living and recreation space, rooms that can serve multiple purposes and the use of colors and furniture that can facilitate a therapeutic milieu.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), for high risk children, "smaller, community-based or regional facilities can provide secure treatment economically and with best possible outcomes for youth involved". These outcomes include reducing recidivism, keeping children connected with their communities and families, targeting interventions that meet the needs of specific jurisdictions, facilitating restorative justice activities, enhancing local partnerships amongst schools and community providers and ensuring a smooth transition home.

The department supports the advancement of the Treatment, Reintegration and Education Centers. We recognize, however, that work done in this arena cannot be done in a vacuum and should consider other efforts being made to reform the juvenile justice system. The Department welcomes the opportunity to continue the discourse with the General Assembly in its consideration of the substantive fiscal and policy issues concerning juvenile services in Connecticut.