



State of Connecticut

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TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

Raised House Bill 7151

An Act Concerning the Closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and the Establishment of Training Rehabilitation and Education Centers

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing February 23, 2007

This testimony is offered on behalf of the Office of the Chief Public Defender. I am Christine Rapillo and I am the Director of Juvenile Delinquency Defense for the Office of the Chief Public Defender. The Office of the Chief Public Defender supports the creation of smaller, regional treatment centers for children who have been committed to the Department of Children and Families because of a delinquency conviction.

For seriously delinquent children, a period of treatment outside the home can sometimes help to stabilize the child and control behaviors that led them into trouble. Statistics on children leaving the Connecticut Juvenile Training School however, show that the residents have a difficult time reentering their communities and schools. While the time away allows them to focus on themselves and their issues, little is done to teach them to cope in the real world. Many of these children come from troubled homes and crime ridden neighborhoods. They need to learn how to handle the pressures that will surely await them when they are released from DCF custody. Large centrally located facilities make the reentry process difficult for both the children and the staff trying to assist them. Staff at CJTS have a difficult time engaging families in therapy and counseling because traveling to the facility is difficult and costly. Smaller, regional centers could also improve school reentry. Many of the children at CJTS have special education issues or have simply not attended a regular public school in months or years. A regional center could allow for a gradual reentry process that would help the schools assess the child's need and allow the child to acclimate to a regular school day.

The decision to close the Connecticut Juvenile Training School affects every aspect of the juvenile justice system in Connecticut. This critical decision should be made in the context of

the major reform underway in the juvenile justice community. As legislators, you will consider many reform proposals during the course of this legislative session. Advocates, legislators, judges and state agency personnel have been meeting for months to discuss services to keep status offenders out of the court system. A similar group has presented the legislature with a recommendation to raise the jurisdictional age for adult prosecution to 18 and a blue print on how to implement this change. It is clear that when 16 and 17 year olds are added to the juvenile justice system, more residential beds will be needed. It is possible that the system will need CJTS and regional treatment facilities to appropriately treat our troubled youth. The decision to close CJTS should wait until other services are available to accommodate all the children who need help. While the Office of the Chief Public Defender supports the creation of regional treatment centers for delinquent children we believe that closing CJTS before a the implementation of other reform efforts, particularly raising the jurisdictional age, could leave juvenile defendants with even fewer placement options than currently exists.

The Office of the Chief Public Defender appreciates the opportunity to be heard on this important issue.