

# State of Connecticut

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY



### COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Judiciary Committee  
Public Hearing  
March 17, 2008

Testimony Submitted by Elizabeth C. Brown

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee, I am here today to testify in support of Raised Bill No. 5926, An Act Concerning Families with Service Needs, Certificates of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth, Reentry and Diversionary Services for Youth, and Drug Courts for Youth.

The Family with Service Needs Task Force established pursuant to PA 05-250, is charged with developing a comprehensive approach to address the needs of Families with Service Needs. These are children who are experiencing a crisis that involves risk behaviors such as truancy, running away or being beyond the control of parents. Parents do not turn to the state and community agencies lightly. But research tells us that without appropriate interventions, often anti-social behaviors quickly escalate into delinquency and further involvement with the Court.

The Task Force took the long view and based on an analysis of the Family with Service Needs population profile identified key indicators and predictors for involvement in both the FWSN system and the Juvenile system. The Task Force recommends a service system focused on the following strategies:

- Prevent children from entering the court system by encouraging positive, pro social development, school attendance, family engagement and community- based programming;
- Intervene to divert at risk children from the court system; and
- Provide evidence-based services to children who enter the court system.

The bill before seeks to implement several of the core recommendations of the Task Force.

- Calls for funding for **truancy reduction pilots** in five school districts experiencing a high number of truants. This pilot will be linked to the state-wide Consortium for School Attendance led by the Office of Policy and Management to ensure best practices are shared and there is ongoing technical assistance.
- Calls for funding to **enhance the capacity of Youth Service Bureaus** to serve the needs of a greater number of Families with Service Needs.

- Calls for additional **employment and educational services** for youth eligible for reentry and diversionary services from the Judicial Department;
- Establishes a new Task Force to study the feasibility of **establishing a separate court or docket to hear matters related to drug offenders** under the age of 18 years old.

Connecticut's efforts over the past few years to reform the juvenile justice system as well as move from crisis spending to more investments in prevention as called for in the state prevention law align with the new policy direction in the bill before you. Public Act 06-182 also established the Youth Futures Committee that issued its Report to the General Assembly, "Connecticut's Framework for Positive Youth Development" that outlines a comprehensive approach to ensure an integrated system of services that address the social, emotional, and cognitive and health and mental health development of children and youth in a holistic manner.

The new policy direction acknowledges that systems must work in collaboration, that not one system alone can adequately meet the needs of a growing number of students at risk for school failure and criminal activity, especially impacting students of color.

The Commission wholeheartedly supports this bold new policy direction, and believes it is in the best interests of children and families. The evidence is clear; truancy is the reason for the highest percentage of referrals of children for families with service needs. In SFY 2005-2006, 990 boys and 789 girls were referred for truancy. In SFY 2006-07, truancy was identified as a referral reason for 944 boys and 809 girls. This bill begins to create the necessary support system for critical school family and community partnerships to turn the curve on this pervasive negative problem. Thank you for allowing me to testify this afternoon.