



**Jeanne Milstein**  
**Child Advocate**

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

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### TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE

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March 17, 2008

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Jeanne Milstein and I am the Child Advocate. I am here today to support several sections of Raised Bill 5926, "An Act Concerning Families with Service Needs, and Certificates of birth Resulting in Stillbirth, Reentry and Diversionary Services for Youth, and Drug Courts for Youth." I am also here to testify in opposition to Raised Bill 5837, "An Act Prohibiting the Placement of Delinquent Sixteen and Seventeen Year Old Children in the Connecticut Juvenile Training School.

First, I fully support Section 6 of the proposed bill which would require the State Department of Education to establish a pilot truancy reduction program in at least three school districts that the Department determines to have the greatest number of pupils found to be a child from family with services needs, because the child is truant or habitually truant. Truancy is one of the most common reasons for a FWSN referral. Yet, we know that consistency in attendance in school can result in better outcomes for youth. It is imperative to implement programs that have been proven effective to keep young people in school.

I also support Section 7, which requires the Commissioner of Education to provide grants to youth service bureaus (YSB) with active juvenile review boards. YSBs have been proven to be effective in providing successful community-based alternatives to the court system for youth. It just makes common sense to expand the services that help children in their own communities. Local connections are paramount to providing consistent, accessible services.

Lastly, I support Sections 10, and 11 which allocate funds for the truancy pilot program and the grants to youth service bureaus.

I oppose Raised Bill No. 5837, An Act Prohibiting the Placement of Delinquent Sixteen and Seventeen Year Old Children in the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. As you all know, last year, Connecticut made a decision to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from sixteen to eighteen. We did so because we recognized that sixteen and seventeen year-old youth are adolescents. We recognized that they do not have the same decision-making capacity as adults, that they are in fact still children. Adolescent brains are simply not finished being built at sixteen and seventeen years of age. We also recognized the need that the way we respond to adolescents who engage in unwanted and illegal behavior will have a significant impact on the kind of adults they will become.

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Prohibiting the placement of these youth in the state's only secure facility for boys involved in the delinquency system would not only require development of unnecessary costly alternative facilities. It would also send the wrong message: that sixteen and seventeen year-old youth are not adolescents. Sixteen and seventeen-year-old youth co-mingle with fourteen and fifteen year old youth in every segment of society. They attend school and compete on sports teams together. They go to church together. They go to the movies, field trips, and concerts together. They do all of these things as adolescents, and when they make bad decisions we ought to respond in a way that recognizes that they are adolescents, by doing good assessments and providing appropriate and timely services in the setting that meets the needs of each individual child.

Thank you for your commitment and for understanding that these preventive measures will not only save lives and result in better outcomes, but taxpayers will reap the benefits as well.