



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER
30 TRINITY STREET
FOURTH FLOOR
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

CHRISTINE PERRA RAPILLO
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER
DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY DEFENSE
(860) 509-6472 TELEPHONE
(860) 509-6495 FAX

**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE DELINQUENT DEFENSE/
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER**

**COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
MARCH 17, 2008**

**H.B. 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 Office of the Chief Public Defender supports sections 1 through 4 of H.B. 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. These sections make necessary technical changes to the Family with Services Needs (FWSN) statutes that were reformed in the last session. While no longer committing status offenders to juvenile detention centers, the FWSN laws still allow for children to be involuntarily removed from home if they violate a court order or place themselves at risk. These proposed revisions will ensure that the due process rights of status offenders are protected by providing an evidentiary hearing before such a child can be placed in a staff secure facility or have their probation conditions modified.

The Office of the Chief Public Defender has serious concerns about Section 9 of this bill which establishes a committee to investigate the feasibility of juvenile drug courts. The drug court model has not been effective in juvenile court in Connecticut. There was a juvenile drug court at the Hartford Juvenile Court several years ago. Few children managed to graduate from the program and it did not prove to be the useful diversionary program that the adult court model suggested. Most drug court participants spent lengthy periods of time in juvenile detention and received little treatment. These were not dangerous offenders who would have otherwise been detained. In the protocol used by the

**Testimony of Christine Rapillo
Director of Juvenile Delinquency Defense
Office of the Chief Public Defender
Page 2**

Hartford Juvenile Drug Court, most children with felony offenses were barred from the program. Detention was used as a consequence for minor, entry level offenders who would have received regular probation and no detention time if they did not participate in the Drug Court. The program was plagued by failures and violations and was eventually discontinued.

Adolescents with substance abuse problems would be better served by the drug education program proposed in Senate Bill 337, An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice. This plan includes counseling, drug education and community service. Statistics show that children and adolescents use drugs differently than their adult counterparts. They require education and therapy that is not part of the drug court model. Drug courts have already shown to be an ineffective method for treating substance issues in Connecticut's youth. The Office of the Chief Public Defender urges the Committee to adopt the proposal in R.B. 337 and reject the concept of drug courts for court involved children.