



March 4, 2009

To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Lisa Griffiths, LMFT Program Director Family Support Center Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Re: Testimony in **OPPOSITION** to H.B. No. 6386 An Act Delaying Implementation of Legislation Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction **AND IN SUPPORT OF EXPANSION OF FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS**

I am Lisa Griffiths Program Director of Wheeler Clinic's Family Support Center. I am providing testimony today in opposition to House Bill 6386 An Act Delaying Implementation of Legislation Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction and asking you to support expansion of Family Support Centers to serve 16 and 17 year olds.

Our Family Support Center serves the Hartford Juvenile Court. Since the program inception in 2008 we have served over 111 families with service needs. The purpose of Family Support Center is to prevent juveniles with problematic behaviors such as truancy, running away, oppositional problems or other difficult behaviors from entering the juvenile justice system. We provide a comprehensive assessment and work closely with the juvenile, his or her family, the schools and community. We support the family's efforts to manage the youngster's problem behaviors and provide necessary treatment, school advocacy and pro-social supports for the youth. Without these services many of these young people would not remain in school, would become alcohol and drug involved, would get involved in gangs or break the law and end up in the juvenile justice system. Each youngster and family we work with has a unique story of struggle, perseverance and hope. I would like to briefly share one of their stories today.

A 15 year old high school freshman was referred to the Family Support Center because she was truant from school. She had missed over 100 days of school and had to repeat the 9th grade. Each day she would refuse to get up and go to school and her overwhelmed mother did not know what to do. Our assessment revealed this teen had been repeatedly bullied with taunts and criticisms from other students while attending another high school. She was so traumatized by the bullying she had become anxious and fearful and her self esteem was extremely low. She did not feel safe within the school environment and was heading toward dropping out. Our team at the center worked with this youth, her mother and the school and developed a plan that allowed her to successfully return to school. We connected the family with a psychiatrist who was able to provide medications to help quell the teen's anxiety and the youth attended a group at the center especially designed for girls to enhance their self esteem. This client is now attending school regularly and doing well academically.

These types of services can be extended to 16 and 17 year olds if the Raise the Age legislation is not delayed and Family Support Centers are expanded throughout Connecticut.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.