



**TESTIMONY OF
THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE**

**FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HEARING ON THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUDGET**

FEBRUARY 18, 2008

This testimony is submitted by Abby Anderson, Executive Director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocates a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

The Alliance strongly opposes the Governor's proposal to cut programs and services in the Department of Children and Families budget that are needed to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of services to youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. In addition, the Alliance is very disappointed that Governor Rell proposes a delay in Raise the Age, which would end Connecticut's practice of putting non-violent minors in adult prisons. This testimony outlines why we strongly believe this would be a mistake – for public safety, for the economy, for re-balancing budgets, and for our youth. As a result, we also oppose the Governor's proposal to cut programs and services in the Department of Children and Families that are needed to ensure an on-time implementation of Raise the Age on January 1, 2010.

These programs and services include flexible funding, in-home family services, group homes and transitional living programs, education and work-to-learn programs, and substance abuse treatment. The effectiveness of the juvenile justice system has greatly improved in recent years. This has led to more in-home and community based services and fewer youth being placed in more expensive, out of home services. Residential providers are experiencing historically low referrals and censuses. FWSN reforms, along with programs working on the detention side of juvenile court have created vacancies in the current system, offering an opportunity for new efficiencies of scale with Raise the Age. The reforms are working; juvenile referrals are steadily declining. Now is not the time to stop. Raising the Age is good for the state's economy, for our communities, for public safety, and for our youth and their future.

Juvenile justice is a small portion of DCF's responsibility. It represents a small number of children and adolescents and only about 10% of its total budget. Still, it is a crucial part of the agency. This is the program area of last resort for involved children and adolescents; it is the moment and opportunity to help set a young person on the right path or risk losing him or her to a life lived in state-run facilities. It is in the best interest of not only the young person, but every taxpayer in the state that we hold these youth

accountable and give them the tools to change their decision-making and get back on track to success.

Why Delaying Raise the Age Would Be a Costly Mistake

During the 2007 legislative session, with the passage of PA 07-4, Connecticut's legislature raised the age of adult jurisdiction from 16 to 18, effective January 1, 2010. Aside from serious and violent offenders, minors will be under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. This is an important and historic change as Connecticut has been one of only three states to try all 16 and 17 year olds as adults -- no matter how minor their crime.

Delaying Raise the Age would balance no budgets. In fact, it would encourage many short-sighted spending practices, and it would be harmful to public safety and to the state's most vulnerable children:

Youth would suffer. Kids sent to adult prisons are more likely to reoffend and to escalate into serious crime than peers in the juvenile system. The governor herself raised the issue of moving these teens to juvenile jurisdiction after a 17-year-old committed suicide in an adult Connecticut prison. Last year, another boy killed himself in the same prison. Youth in adult prisons are also at greater risk of serious assault by adult inmates.

Delay would encourage inefficiency and waste. Connecticut wisely made a shift toward community-based early intervention in recent years. The success of these programs has created many vacancies in DCF and Court Support Services Division programs -- the very programs that would receive many of the 16- and 17-year-olds affected by the law. These programs could serve more children at little cost and ease overcrowding in adult prisons at considerable savings.

The state has spent more than \$6 million in preparation for Raise the Age; money that would be wasted if we don't proceed. The legislatively mandated Juvenile Jurisdiction Planning and Oversight Coordinating Council (JJPOCC) has been meeting regularly to ensure timely and appropriate implementation of policy and practice shifts so that a smooth transition will occur in January of 2010.

Raise the Age is not an unfunded mandate. Lobbyists armed with misinformation have painted Raise the Age as burdensome to municipalities. In fact, no police department will have to change its physical space in response to the law, which includes new provisions that spare local departments the job of holding teens. Eighty one percent of Connecticut municipalities only arrest one child in this age group per week.

Raise the Age contributes to economic growth. An adult record cuts off opportunities for education, jobs, military service and myriad other avenues to productive citizenship. Every year thousands of Connecticut teens have their economic potential stunted by an adult arrest for a minor charge. Furthermore, Raise the Age will create hundreds of jobs -- for probation officers, counselors and social workers.

Raising the Age is not a luxury. Raise the Age is already law, a commitment made by our governor and legislators. The state would not be deferring a program that would be “nice to have;” delaying would be a broken promise.

The Country is Applauding and Watching

Connecticut is winning national praise for its recent juvenile justice reform. The state is being showcased by national organizations and legislative groups, including:

- **National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL):** Representative Toni Walker spoke about Connecticut at the NCSL *Spring Forum* in Washington, DC and is featured in NCSL’s *State Legislatures* magazine;
- **Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA):** At CPA’s *Summit on the States* in December in Washington, DC, representatives of the Connecticut General Assembly and CTJJA presented on Connecticut’s reform;
- **National Black Caucus of State Legislatures (NBCSL):** Connecticut representatives presented at their national conference in Little Rock in December;
- **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ):** The Hon. Barbara M. Quinn spoke at NCJFCJ’s national conference in St. Louis in March, and an article authored by the Hon. William Lavery was featured in NCJFCJ’s publication *Juvenile and Family Justice Today*;
- **American Correctional Association (ACA):** ACA featured a piece by Senator Ed Meyer in *Corrections Today*. Department of Juvenile Services Director Leo Arnone was a featured speaker at ACA’s annual meeting in New Orleans;
- **Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ):** Connecticut was featured prominently in a roundtable discussion at CJJ’s spring conference where the audience included state officials and members of state advisory groups from all over the country;
- **2008 Kids Count Juvenile Justice Essay:** Each year, Kids Count focuses an essay on one topic and in 2008 they focused on juvenile justice. The essay highlights Connecticut’s legislative success in raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction and marks it as a critical reform model that other states and jurisdictions should follow.

In conclusion, it is critical that Connecticut stay on track to on-time implementation of Raise the Age on January 1, 2010. The Alliance understands the road will be bumpy without ideal levels of funding; but that is not a reason to delay. There are vacancies in the current juvenile system, offering an opportunity for new efficiencies of scale with Raise the Age. The reforms are working; juvenile referrals are steadily declining. Now

is not the time to stop. Raising the Age is good for the state's economy, for our communities, for public safety, and for our youth and their future.

Thank you for your time and attention to this most important matter; please do not hesitate to let me know if I can provide additional information.

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