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**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
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R. B. NO. 6489, AN ACT CONCERNING REPORTING OF SCHOOL BASED ARRESTS

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I am Christine Rapillo and I am the Director of Juvenile Delinquency Defense for the Office of the Chief Public Defender. I am here today on behalf of the Chief Public Defender to speak in support of **Raised Bill 6489, An Act Concerning Reporting of School Based Arrests**. We believe that passage of **Raised Bill 6489** is necessary because towns and cities do not regularly maintain data on arrests at schools, making meaningful research on this issue almost impossible in Connecticut.

Over the past 10 years it has become regular practice for schools to employ school resource officers, which are fully sworn police officers, to deal with security and discipline issues. Groups like the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, Tow Foundation and Connecticut Voices for Children have wanted to study the effect of law enforcement presence in the schools and engage in a detailed examination of the how and why schools refer children to court. Advocates in the juvenile justice system believe that the involvement of law enforcement in school discipline has led to a dramatic increase in the number of kids being arrested at school. This belief is based mostly on anecdotal information obtained from educators, law enforcement, probation officers and lawyers, as most communities do not keep track of this data. Those that do keep records have no consistent definition of what constitutes a "school based arrest". The American Civil Liberties Union investigated school based arrests in three Connecticut communities and issued a report in November, 2008. The study looked at East Hartford, West Hartford and Hartford and found that the presence of police officers in schools seemed to increase the number of arrests that occurred in schools. The study found that data collection in every town was inadequate and concluded that Hartford, which reported very few school based arrests, underreported the instances of arrest in school.

Christine Rapillo, Executive Assistant Public Defender, Office of Chief Public Defender
Testimony before the Committee on Education
Re: R.B. No. 6489, An Act Concerning Reporting Of School Based Arrests

Schools are currently required to report discipline activities to the State Department of Education but do not indicate which discipline results in an arrest. **Raised Bill 6489** would simply require towns to indicate when an arrest was involved. Based on the discipline data from the State Department of Education, we believe that the majority of these arrests are for fighting, violation of school rules or some form of verbal insubordination, situations that in the past would be handled by teachers or guidance counselors without the involvement of police. This is an important proposal that will help us determine how many children are being sent into the criminal and juvenile justice systems from their schools. For years, we have heard about the "school to prison pipeline", a catchy phrase which describes the process by which schools have increasingly referred their students into the court system. While Connecticut data on how many children are being sent from school to court and to prison has been hard to obtain, nationally, many studies have shown that more children are being arrested in school. This has occurred while the juvenile crime rate has gone down dramatically. The impact of this trend is felt most dramatically by poor children and children of color. In a 2005 study, *Education on Lockdown* by the Advancement Project at Harvard University studied several urban school districts across the country and concluded that African American children represented only 17% of public school enrollment nationwide in 2000, but accounted for 34% of suspensions. Likewise, in 2003, African-American youths made up 16% of the nation's overall juvenile population but accounted for 45% of juvenile arrests. Moreover, studies show that African-American students are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the *same kind* of conduct at school.

It is important to know if Connecticut really has an issue with school based arrests. We need to know if schools are inappropriately using law enforcement to effect school discipline policies. The municipalities, parents and advocates for policies affecting school children need to be able to measure the effectiveness of school resource officers. While the number of arrests is certainly not the only measurement it is a critically important piece of data. The success of children in our juvenile justice system depends, in large part, on their ability to attend and make progress in school. Students who are excluded from school, whether it is because of suspension, expulsion or referral to juvenile court are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system, populating or adult correctional facilities. **Raised Bill 6489** should mandate that towns add arrest data to the regular discipline reports sent to the State Department of Education to allow for more detailed and meaningful study of this important issue affecting our school children.