



TESTIMONY OF
THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE

FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
REGARDING

H.B. 6567 AN ACT CONCERNING READMISSION OF STUDENTS
S.B. No. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS
REGARDING EDUCATION (Sec. 17) delaying for two years the implementation of in-
school suspension guidelines

H.B. 5769 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL DROPOUTS

MARCH 9, 2009

This testimony is submitted by Lara Herscovitch, Senior Policy Associate at 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 supports the intention of Bill No. 6567 concerning the readmission of students, but believes the language of the bill must be modified to meet this goal. The Alliance believes that legislation is necessary in order to prevent schools from expelling students who have already spent time out of the district for the same offense, i.e. they were in jail (16 & 17) or they were in DCF care (residential or CJTS) and are now coming home and trying to come back to school.

The language of section 2 of this bill, as currently written, would only apply to students who are over 16 and have been expelled before. Students who were eligible for an alternative education program could still be denied readmission. We have attached proposed substitute language here:

(NEW) (2) If the student who committed the expellable offence seeks to re-enter the district after being in an out of district placement as a result of the same offense, the district must allow the student to re-enroll and cannot move to expel the student for that offense.

Students simply cannot learn when they are not in school. We all know that individuals who finish high school are much more likely to become successful adults. When students face multiple barriers to school re-entry after an out of district placement they are likely to become discouraged and drop out of school entirely.

Regarding S.B. 830, the Alliance strongly opposes the Governor's proposal to delay implementation of the in-school suspension changes until 2011. There are many misunderstandings of this legislation, which was intended to prevent the inappropriate out-of-school suspensions.

Myth: Schools can never use out-of-school suspensions as part of their disciplinary procedure.

Fact: The law states that school's can out-of-school suspend if the pupil poses a danger to

persons or property or causes a disruption of the educational process. The discretion is still in the hands of the school leaders.

Myth: Schools must create a new in-school suspension program.

Fact: Schools do not have to in-school suspend anyone if they do not want to. Schools are not required to create an in-school suspension program at all. An alternative program, like Saturday detention would be perfectly acceptable.

As I mentioned before, schools will be free to impose a wide range of disciplinary options, entirely within their discretion. These could take form in detention, reprimands, withdrawal of privileges, community services and any other method the school deems suitable. It is critical that Connecticut stay on track with the implementation of the "in-school suspension bill" set for July 1, 2009. As the Governor herself said when she signed this legislation into law in 2007:

"Student learning takes place primarily when students are in school. That is why we need policies like this that keep students in school, not at home. Keeping children out of school is a direct line to delinquent behavior. Students get farther behind in their course work. They lose hope of catching up. It's a recipe for failure."
(Governor Rell, June 28, 2007)

The Alliance also fully supports H.B. 5769 An Act Regarding School Dropouts. This bill would increase the age at which a student can drop out of school from 16 to 18. As mentioned above, a high school diploma is an predictor of future success and a tool that helps keep youth out of the juvenile justice system. As we prepare to raise our age of jurisdiction to 18, our dropout age should be raised to 18 as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. Should you have any questions we would be happy to answer them.

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