



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY MARCH 2, 2009

RAISED BILL NO. 6386, AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION

The Office of the Chief Public Defender opposes **Raised Bill 6386, An Act Delaying Implementation of Legislation Raising the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction**. While the state must find ways to deal with the serious budget crisis, full scale delay of the Raise the Age Legislation will not save money long term. Our juvenile justice system has undergone serious review and reform over the last few years and is working more effectively to treat troubled children and ensure that they do not enter or return to the court system. The reform of the Family With Services Needs (FWSN) System has diverted hundreds of families out of the court system and into Family Support Centers, that treat the individual family's needs with limited court involvement. These programs have contributed to a more than 30% decrease in the number of delinquency referrals statewide. The Family Support Centers are available in only four locations across the state and should be fully funded and implemented to continue this promising trend towards diversion.

All this good work in juvenile court has led to unused capacity in juvenile programs. Full scale delay in implementing the Raise the Age legislation will leave these vacancies unfilled and will result in the taxpayers paying for services that will not be used. Raised Bill 6580 proposes to phase in raising the age by including 16 year olds in 2010 and delaying implementation for 17 year olds. The Office of the Chief Public Defender believes that this proposal is the best policy moving forward as it maximizes the use current resources.

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The Judicial Branch runs the juvenile detention centers. The detention system has had at least 100 empty beds for at least the past two months. These are beds that the state must pay for even when they are unoccupied. CJTS was originally built for 240 boys. Current population maintains at or below 100 boys. Again, these are beds we pay for even when they are not used. Any 16 year old that is moved out of DOC and into Juvenile Detention or CJTS saves the state money. DCF runs the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, the secure facility for delinquent boys. A "phase- in" of the Raise the Age legislation will maximize the use of resources while providing the best long term outlook for children.