



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF
COMMISSIONER SUSAN I. HAMILTON, M.S.W., J.D.**

**JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 4, 2009**

Good morning Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Susan Hamilton, and I am Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on several bills pending before you today.

**S.B. No. 674 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING LOCAL EXPENDITURES RELATED
TO THE CHANGE IN THE AGE OF JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION**

**H.B. No. 6386 AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING
THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION**

**H.B. No. 6575 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO PROVISIONS
RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION**

H.B. No. 6580 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE

Each of these bills relates to the issue regarding the age of jurisdiction for the juvenile justice system. The Department recognizes the significance of the "raise the age" law that is scheduled for implementation on January 1, 2010, but we also recognize the overwhelming fiscal challenges facing our state.

First off, the Department would like to make it clear that we are committed to raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction. However, in order to properly implement this new law, considerable new resources are necessary, not only for DCF, but also for the Judicial Branch, local law enforcement and others. Unfortunately, these resources cannot be provided at this time without jeopardizing other essential state services. We believe that a delay in the implementation date of the "raise the age" law will allow the Department, the Judicial Branch and others to continue to work with the various stakeholders to ensure that the necessary programs and services are in place to successfully implement this important policy change in 2012.

By way of background, we anticipate the following:

Anticipated Numbers of Additional Committed Boys:

- 150 committed 16 and 17 year-old boys per year with an average commitment of 24 months, or
- 300 boys at any given time.
 - 80 Secure Residential

- 60 Residential / Group Homes
- 160 At home with services and Parole supervision.

Anticipated Numbers of Additional Committed Girls:

- 48 committed 16 and 17 year-old girls per year with an average commitment of 24 months, or
- Approximately 96 girls at any given time.
 - 18 Secure Residential
 - 18 Residential /Group Home
 - 60 At home with services and Parole supervision

In the area of secure treatment, we believe that monitoring and evaluation have shown improvements to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) over time. The focus in the initial five years of CJTS was primarily on how service is *delivered* rather than on *outcomes*. Given the improvements in CJTS service delivery, attention is now focused on improving measurable outcomes for youth served at CJTS. As some of you may be aware based on discussions last session, the Department is proposing to transition and redesign CJTS in several ways to meet the needs of the additional population of youth that will require CJTS placement when the jurisdictional age change goes into effect. The new facility will be renamed the Connecticut Juvenile Services Complex (CJSC), which will be renovated to provide more youth-appropriate physical environments. We also plan an expansion of education programming and improved medical and mental health services. The capital funding of \$8,000,000 to move forward with this redesign to implement the jurisdictional age change was included in the Governor's mid-term capital budget adjustment last year, but a bond bill was never passed. The Governor has again evidenced her commitment to this initiative by proposing this funding again in her proposed biennial capital budget for FY2010-2011.

Also under development is a secure facility for girls in Bridgeport. This facility, currently under design, will be an 18-bed, short-term secure facility. It will serve both older and younger girls, through separate programming and schedules, based upon gender-informed practices which will be employed in programming and design.

Another component of our plans is in the area of residential treatment and group home programming. It is anticipated that we will need 60 beds for boys and 18 beds for girls that will be provided by private provider residential / group home beds: We also need access to short and longer-term residential substance abuse treatment, both in-home and outpatient along with family-based recovery support.

Finally, we are committed to supporting youth in their communities. We anticipate the need for increased community supports with an anticipated need of 160 boys slots and 60 girls slots. This can be accomplished through an expansion of existing services and the development of new services. We anticipate a need for education and vocational programming; juvenile services education re-entry programs (STEP); a virtual learning academy; work to learn programs; job coaching; community life skills programs; flex funding; mentoring services; parenting and

childcare services; substance abuse treatment and family-based recovery; educational and vocational services; sex offender treatment services; and other community-based supports.

If the "raise the age" law is delayed, we will use the time wisely. We intend to move forward with needed renovations at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) that are necessary to adjust to the needs of a slightly older population. In addition, we remain focused on getting the Girls' Facility up and running in Bridgeport, and we will continue developing the new program designs that will be needed for some of the programs referenced above. Our planning committees will also continue to work on the necessary policy and practice changes that will be needed at the Department, and the Joint Juvenile Justice Strategic Planning Implementation Team will continue its collaborative work on a host of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system.

H.B. No. 6574 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL AND OTHER JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES
--

The Department of Children and Families is **opposed** to H.B. No. 6574 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL AND OTHER JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES.

This bill would restrict DCF's ability to develop needed secure beds for both boys and girls in the juvenile justice system. While we are committed to serving as few youth as possible in secure state-operated facilities, we believe this legislation would make it difficult to meet the demands of the "raise the age" law and could potentially jeopardize the current development of the necessary girls' secure facility. We certainly recognize the importance of working with local municipalities in the development and implementation of any changes to these programs, but requiring the legislative body of the municipality to approve the establishment or increase in census at CJTS or other existing detention facilities is unnecessary and could impede the Department's ability to meet its statutory mandates. In addition, it's important to note that the General Assembly already has significant authority over these state-operated facilities in terms of the budget process and bonding authorizations for capital improvements.

I hope this information is helpful. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.