



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE**  
**FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**  
**FEBRUARY 26, 2010**

**HB 5148: AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: This testimony is submitted by Abigail 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.

HB 5148 is meant to exempt the Judicial Branch from a requirement to reduce its Other Expenses to the fiscal year 2007 level. The Branch has testified that this reduction in expenditures has resulted in it not contracting for 6 legislatively-mandated Family Support Centers, which would provide services to the highest need Family with Services Needs children and their families. **The Alliance strongly believes that these services are critical for the success of children, families and the continuing effectiveness of the juvenile justice system.**

Family Support Center services address the needs of children and youth (and their families) who are exhibiting out of control behavior, including running away and truancy. **If their needs are not met at this serious warning stage, they are at great risk of escalating into juvenile delinquency, which is much more expensive to address.**

Funding for Family Support Centers comes out of the recommendation of the legislatively-mandated Families With Service Needs Advisory Board. A direct result of the Board's work, Public Act 07-4 requires that juvenile court, after assessment by a probation officer, divert Families With Service Needs children and families assessed as high risk/needs to a Family Support Center. However, there are only four out of ten centers funded and up and running (in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury). **As a result, only 39 of Connecticut's cities and towns are currently served by a Family Support Center.**

In 2009, the existing Centers served 422 children. With the addition of the new Family Support Centers, the FWSN Advisory Board estimates that **this number would more than double – adding 515 children and youth (along with their families) who are receiving no services now (205 new slots).**

**Community-based interventions that involve the whole family work: 81%<sup>1</sup> of children and families who successfully complete a Family Support Center program have no further juvenile justice involvement.** These Centers reduce court involvement

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<sup>1</sup> Process and Outcome Evaluation of the 2007-2009 CT FWSN Needs Project: Interim Report. Justice Research Center, Inc.

and residential treatment, and increase overall system savings. They provide immediate access to comprehensive services, including:

- Screening and assessment at the initial stage of the process and case management throughout the time a family is engaged with the Center;
- 24-hour crisis counseling and intervention;
- Positive youth development activities;
- Flexible funding to tailor individual plans, including but not limited to
  - Mentoring,
  - Employment stipends, and
  - After-school activities;
- Educational advocacy;
- One-on-one therapeutic sessions (including trauma treatment, if needed) and mediation; and
- Up to two weeks of respite care (if needed).

**We strongly urge you to empower the Branch to provide these services for FWSN children and their families. A Family Support Center does not necessarily require new infrastructure. These services can be provided by an existing entity such as a Youth Service Bureau.**

The more children and families we can serve outside of the court system the better it is for the families and for the state. Connecticut has proven that early intervention, prevention and diversion models work, and save the state money. The State now has the opportunity to address more status offenders by identifying and meeting their needs early and quickly, thereby reducing the number of children who end up in the juvenile justice system.

Thank you for your time.

Abigail Anderson, Executive Director, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance