



**TESTIMONY OF THE MIDDLESEX COALITION FOR CHILDREN
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 26, 2010**

HB 5148: AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

This testimony is submitted by Betsy Morgan, Director of the Middlesex Coalition for Children (Coalition). The Coalition is an advocacy organization devoted to improving the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County.

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 Coalition strongly believes that these services are critical for the success of children, families and the continuing effectiveness of the juvenile justice system. We urge you to help empower the Branch to provide these critical services, which do not necessarily require new infrastructure. They can be provided by an existing service provider.**

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. Although there is a legislative mandate for ten Family Support Centers statewide, there are only four up and running. **None of our young people in Middletown, Meriden, or any town in Middlesex County, have access to one.** The FWSN Advisory Board estimates that these children number up to 90 each year who are unserved. Each one of these children is at great risk of escalating into juvenile delinquency, which is much more expensive to address in the short-term as well as in the long-term.

81% of children and families who successfully complete a Family Support Center program have no further juvenile justice involvement. These Centers reduce court involvement and residential treatment, and increase overall system savings. Depending on individual needs, they can provide immediate assessment and access to services, including case management, 24-hour crisis intervention, positive youth development and after-school activities, mentoring, employment stipends, educational advocacy, one-on-one therapy and trauma treatment, and respite care.

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. **Our children deserve this!**

Thank you for your time.