



**TESTIMONY OF STAMFORD YOUTH SERVICES
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 26, 2010**

HB 5148: AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Good Morning Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I have a special greeting for Representative Fox and Representative Tong, both whom represent my home town of Stamford. My name is Terri Drew, Director of the Youth Services Bureau for the City of Stamford. I am here to testify in support of HB 5148, An Act Concerning Funding for the Judicial Branch.

The Youth Services Bureau is explicitly defined via State Statute as the local agency that is “designed to act as an agent, for the purpose of evaluation, planning, coordination and implementation of prevention and treatment services for delinquent, pre-delinquent and troubled youth.” The Stamford Youth Services Bureau has a lengthy and effective history of collaborating with local and regional organizations that provide services to, and advocate for, the positive development of children and youth.

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 neediest Family’s with Service Needs. The Stamford Youth Services Bureau believes that these services are critical for the success of children families and the continuing effectiveness of the juvenile justice system.

Communities serviced by Family Support Centers are equipped with screening and assessment tools, case management services throughout the entire time the family is engaged with the center, 24 hour crisis counseling and intervention, positive youth development activities, flexible funding to tailor individual case plans, educational advocates, respite care and therapeutic and mediation sessions.

In Stamford our Families with Service Needs do not have the benefit of receiving direct case management from a professional who can take time to find out the underlying reasons for the behaviors and make appropriate referrals for services based on their assessments. Stamford’s FWSN’s are serviced by probation officers and often times the interventions are viewed as punishments by both the parent and the child. The benefit of an FSC would be that the child

would be serviced outside of the court in an environment that would set them apart from those who are being serviced on the delinquent end of the juvenile justice system. An FSC would be able to dedicate the time and resources necessary to build relationships with the schools and local providers to build a strong support system for the FWSN child and family. Because an FSC can access all the programs and services that probation can access, often time the FWSN child will stay out of the court system and their behavior will not be criminalized but they will get the services needed to address the concerning behavior.

In Stamford there was a 14 year old girl who was being raised by her single father. She came to the attention of the YSB as a truant with behavior problems. This 14 year old would run away from home, skip school, and hang around with negative peers. She was summoned to court the same way any normal FWSN referral is; the probation officer met with her to discuss the allegations. The girl did not go into details of her behaviors during the short period of time that the probation officer had to dedicate to the interview. After assessing what was thought to be the issues, the probation officer referred her to a contracted community program for services. Unfortunately, the out of control behaviors continued. The girl ended up getting arrested because of a domestic dispute with her father, which resulted in involvement with the juvenile justice system. Her FWSN type behaviors continued, but as a delinquent they are handled differently. The next time she ran away from home she was placed in detention, deepening her involvement with the court system. It is our belief that if this family was receiving the services that are offered by an FSC this father and child would have known that the police did not have to be called. They may have had a better understanding of his daughter's behaviors because in the beginning of the FWSN process, a more thorough assessment would have been done. The FSC would have had more time to get to know not only what the girl's issues were but what the family's issues were. There are many cases like this one in our Stamford Juvenile Court.

According to the Connecticut based TOW Foundation, in their Juvenile Justice Initiative report 2007, the cost to society for a high risk youth's life of crime is 3.8 million dollars and the benefit to society for a college graduates lifetime tax contribution is 1 million dollars.

The Stamford Youth Services Bureau strongly urges you to sanction the Branch to provide these services for FWSN children and their families. The Family Support Center model does not always require a new infrastructure. The Stamford YSB is poised and ready to take on this endeavor!

Thank you for your time.

Terri Drew, Director, Youth Services Bureau, City of Stamford