

**TESTIMONY OF POSANDRA HIGGINS
TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 5521
AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM
AND ERASURE OF JUVENILE RECORDS**

MARCH 19, 2010

My name is Posandra Higgins and I am a resident of Hartford and the mother of child who has been involved in the juvenile justice system for three years. **I urge the committee to pass Raised Bill No. 5521, An Act Concerning Child Welfare and the Juvenile Justice System and Erasure of Juvenile Records, because I believe that it will help children like my son and families like my family.**

My son is a good child. He has a good heart and loves school. He also has special needs including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and suffers from trauma from witnessing domestic abuse. He made some poor choices and as a result became involved with the police on several occasions which began his path into juvenile detention and placement in an out-of-state residential treatment facility. Although I told everyone that he was in crisis and needed help, he did not get the services that he needed. Only now, three years later, did he receive an evaluation that verified all of my concerns. I believe that he will now start receiving the services that are appropriate for his special needs.

The existing system is not designed for kids in crisis like my son. The system needs to ask why a child gets into trouble and what are the child's needs. These are kids who are crying out for help and everybody wants to throw them away.

Raised Bill No. 5521 will not solve everything that is wrong with the juvenile justice system, but it is a good start. For example, I believe Connecticut should keep children who need residential treatment in-state by investing the money now spent on out-of-state facilities on services here in Connecticut. However, I think this legislation is a good start for three reasons.

First, it would require a court order before placing a child in detention. This would allow a judge to become involved in the decision which should result in more information being available about the child's unique circumstances, any special needs, and possible alternatives to detention, rather than leaving the decision to the police officer.

Second, the bill would require state agencies to coordinate and come up with plans to reduce the unfair treatment of minority youth in the juvenile justice system. This would lead to more minority children getting the services they need rather than going straight to juvenile justice system.

Finally, this bill will make it easier for some children who have made poor choices to clear their records and get a fresh start. Now that my son is able to get the services he needs, I want him to be able to have a new beginning.

We need to ask why children get into trouble and make sure they get the services and help they need to address their problems. I want my son to reach his full potential and be the person he can be. This legislation will not solve everything, but it is a step toward helping children like my son. Please vote in favor of Raised Bill No. 5521.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, you may contact me (860) 251-8192.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Posandra Higgins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Posandra Higgins
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