



**Testimony by Marilyn Calderón
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Truancy Court Prevention Project (TCPP)**

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President and CEO*

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**Before the Committee on Education
In Support of Raised Senate Bill #278, An Act Concerning Truancy**

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For the past 15 years, I have had the opportunity to work in many facets of our state's educational system as a parent, teacher (K-8th), Family Resource Center Director, Open Choice Coordinator and now as a Senior Director of the Truancy Court Prevention Project, a joint program with The Village for Families & Children, Inc., Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), and Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). Throughout my experiences, I have witnessed many children and youth who have demonstrated early warning signs of truancy, which later caused chronic absenteeism, retention, and learning delays that led to behavioral challenges.

Students that are truant tend to end up in very difficult situations, such as: suspension, expulsion, delinquent behaviors and/or result in dropping out of school. Having earned my sixth year in Educational Leadership and seeing first hand how we, the administrators of our school systems can positively effect the outcomes that determine the success of children and youth alike by becoming better observers of their verbal and non-verbal cues by getting all children motivated to attain productive daily attendance/participation and higher test scores. I realize that the success of a child or youth is hard to determine if the student is not in school. Therefore, closing the achievement gap becomes less realistic when many children and youth are losing academic learning minutes or hours by being chronically late to their classes without the much needed support structures.

Therefore, it is critical to protect the classroom instructional hours by ensuring that a uniform system is implemented to support this growing challenge of truancy as early as kindergarten. The provision in this Bill, holding all school districts accountable for a timely submission of referrals after non-cooperation with the parents will ensure that students of all ages receive the support necessary to cooperate with the schools attempting to resolve such truant challenges.

I remember providing services for a youth named Jose who took part in our Open Choice Program in North Haven who was labeled a truant student, due to chronic tardiness and/or absenteeism. I remember, asking him what is it that makes him come to school late every day – he shared the need to care for his grandmother first thing in the morning, missing the school bus at 6:30, then needing to take a cab from his home, which still got him to school after 7:45 am, which then required a late pass to get to class that in the end caused problems with his teachers.



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There are hundreds of children and youth like Jose every day in our school system who need other support structures to be successful in school, as they play the dual role of a caring adult, as well as, a student to attain their educational goals.

This is what Senate Bill #278 requires --- to follow through to ensure that within a 15 day period referrals will take place to help build the necessary systems that help support the whole child through wrap around services that assist with earlier interventions and a timely process.

The provision in the bill that requires the State Department of Education to define "excused" and "unexcused absences," also is important. By requiring definitions, the State Board of Education will be held accountable for implementing structures that are more apt to work through a shared vision of building uniform best practices to remedy the challenges of truancy. It will also allow for increased monitoring and sharing of data throughout all school districts.

In conclusion, please support Bill No. 278. It is my hope that you continue to support procedures that will indeed assist in structuring services for our children, youth and families in a way that ensures that everyone wins – through uniform best practices!

Respectfully submitted,

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