



## State of Connecticut

### DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER  
30 TRINITY STREET  
FOURTH FLOOR  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

CHRISTINE PERRA RAPILLO  
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER  
DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY DEFENSE  
(860) 509-6472 TELEPHONE  
(860) 509-6495 FAX

### TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

#### *Raised Bill 5430, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Children and Youth from Out of State Residential Facilities to Therapeutic Group Homes in the State*

#### Human Services Committee Public Hearing - March 9, 2010

The Office of the Chief Public Defender supports passage of *Raised Bill 5430, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Children and Youth from Out of State Residential Facilities to Therapeutic Group Homes in the State*. This bill would require the Department of Children and Families to submit a plan to reduce the number of children in out of state residential facilities by increasing the number of therapeutic group homes in this state. The Office of Chief Public Defender supports this concept and believes that the study should be expanded to include a plan to improve and support the agencies that currently provide residential services in Connecticut.

For years, Connecticut has been unable to provide in state residential services for the most troubled of our youth. The state lacks appropriate facilities for children with developmental disabilities, autism, severe mental illness and problem sexual behavior. This problem affects both delinquent children and those committed to the Department of Children and Families pursuant to a child welfare case. Many of these boys and girls are placed in Massachusetts but a significant number go to places in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida and Iowa. This is financially costly and hinders the chances for successful reintegration into the home and school. It is hard for families to make regular visits with these children, and this makes it difficult for children and families to work collaboratively on the issues that lead to the removal of the child from the home. Without the ability to do regular family counseling and therapy, families are less likely to be successful when a child comes home or is moved to a less restrictive facility in Connecticut.

Over the past decade many of the facilities and agencies that traditionally served our most troubled children have closed their doors or changed the target groups for their services. Some facilities were shut down by DCF for failing to provide appropriate services to the children they were contracted to help. Others, like the Connecticut Junior Republic in Litchfield, found themselves unable to meet the changing needs of today's youth. Many of the children committed to DCF for placement in residential facilities have significant mental health needs that our traditional agencies have been ill equipped to treat.

**Testimony of Christine Rapillo  
Office of the Chief Public Defender  
Raised Bill 5430  
Page 2**

DCF has attempted to help some facilities adapt to the changing client base. But without a comprehensive plan to provide support and assistance in reforming their mission, Connecticut programs will continue to fail and the problem of out of state placements will continue. Mandating that DCF prepare a plan not only to increase the number of therapeutic group homes but to also study the existing facilities available in Connecticut will help this state understand what the needs are and allow the Legislature to effectively plan and budget for new and improved services. The result will be better outcomes for children and families.