

**MARCH 19, 2010 TESTIMONY OF
GLEND A ARMSTRONG
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REGARDING
HB 5521: AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE AND THE JUVENILE
JUSTICE SYSTEM AND ERASURE OF JUVENILE RECORDS'**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: This testimony is submitted by Glenda Armstrong, member of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) and Chair of the JJAC's Subcommittee on Disproportionate Minority Contact.

I am testifying in support of HB 5521, which would help reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact in the juvenile justice system by requiring (A) neutral third-party approval for all juvenile detention facility admissions and (B) annual reports from designated agencies regarding DMC – both recommendations come directly from the State's Governor-appointed Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee.

I believe that all young people should be held accountable for their behavior, in a way that is fair and equal – they should be treated the same, regardless of race or ethnicity. Nationally, young people of color are more likely to come in contact with the juvenile justice system and are treated more harshly there. The same is true in Connecticut. This issue is known as disproportionate minority contact or DMC. Federal law requires states to document DMC and create plans to stop it. The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) has come up with a number of recommendations with the goal to eliminate disparate treatment based on race or ethnicity – the changes in HB 5521 are two of them (a copy of the full report is available at www.ctjuststart.org).

Through contractor Spectrum Associates, the JJAC has conducted three in-depth, scientific studies of DMC in the juvenile justice system over the past two decades. The first study found, in 1991, that Black and Hispanic juveniles accused of a Serious Juvenile Offense (SJO) were 2½ to 3 times more likely to be placed in a juvenile detention center than White juveniles accused of SJOs. The same was true for juveniles accused of non-SJO and misdemeanor crimes. Because of overcrowding in detention facilities, Connecticut law was changed to require approval by a judge to admit a child accused of a non-SJO offense or a misdemeanor into a juvenile detention center. The second study found, in 1998, that DMC had been eliminated at detention admission for those crimes that required they court order – non-SJO crimes and misdemeanors. However, **Black and Hispanic juveniles accused of SJOs were still 2½ times more likely to be detained than White juveniles accused of SJOs**. They still are. The third study, in 2009, showed that Black and Hispanic children accused of SJOs were almost twice as likely to be placed in a detention center.

Of the three categories of offenses committed by children and youth, currently, a court order is required for admission to a juvenile detention center for two of them: misdemeanors and non-SJO felonies. HB 5521 would add the third category, SJOs, to that procedure, so that all detention facility admissions would require a court order. To have another set of eyes looking at the serious decision to admit our young people to a detention center is not too much to ask of our state.

A second recommendation of the JJAC is that the responsible state agencies should report to the state each year on plans and progress in addressing DMC. This will complement the JJAC's more intensive, comprehensive research of DMC every seven years, giving us more insight and information to help drive system improvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.