



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 3, 2010**

SB 224 AN ACT CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR YOUTHFUL OFFENDER STATUS

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee:
This testimony is submitted by Abigail Anderson, Executive Director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocates a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

The Alliance opposes SB 224, which would eliminate a young person's ability to be protected by the Youthful Offender program more than once. Currently, a person age 17 or younger charged with a misdemeanor is granted Youthful Offender status, even if there are multiple cases or the client has used the program before. This is an appropriate use of the program. Young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system are often engaged in a pattern of disruptive behavior that may involve multiple charges.

Given the well-accepted science on adolescent brain development, we know that teenagers make multiple mistakes, compounded by subsequent bad choices. They often take longer to process the consequence of their actions than adults, which can (and does) result in multiple criminal cases.

The Youthful Offender program gives the court the ability to render consequences to these youth while offering some treatment and confidentiality. Having multiple cases should not, on its own, prevent these youth from benefiting from these important protections offered by the Youthful Offender program.

The current statute offers the court many ways to deal with a young person who commits multiple offenses or presents a danger. The Youthful Offender program is not a diversion plan or a juvenile court treatment program. Young people who are classified as Youthful Offenders are held pretrial in adult correctional facilities and can be sentenced to as many as four years of incarceration. In the case of a youth charged with a felony, Connecticut General Statutes §54-76(d) gives the State's Attorney the ability to move to transfer the case from Youthful Offender status and have it placed on the regular criminal docket. **Clearly the court has ample methods to deal with reoffending youth without automatically denying them access to the Youthful Offender program.**

Thank you for your time.