CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE

FEBRUARY 23, 2010 TESTIMONY OF
THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
REGARDING
SB 156: AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSFER OF EDUCATIONALCREDITS
SB 153: AN ACT PROVIDING A SAFE HARBOR FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children: This testimony is submitted by Lara Herscovitch, Senior Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance is a statewide, private 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 supports Senate Bill 156 which would require Connecticut school districts to accept the academic credits that children earn within the Department of Children and Families school district (Unified School District #2) in the same way that they must accept credits from any youth re-entering the district from another school, including the Department of Correction's Unified School District #1. We know it has also been a problem for kids not getting academic credit for work done while in juvenile detention facilities and we would support statutory changes to close that loophole.

The proposed change for USD #2 academic credit is non-controversial; it is simply correcting an oversight. Without a guarantee of credit acceptance, students can return to their home school from a long-term placement thinking they have earned enough credits to be a junior, and instead be told that their credits won't transfer and they are still freshmen. This unfair situation creates frustration and a likelihood of dropout – which increases the risk of further delinquency.

The Alliance is also in support of Senate Bill 153, the intent of which is to recognize that children engaged in prostitution are *victims* of sexual exploitation and not criminals. It aims to make it more difficult for minors to be prosecuted for this crime, and comes with the hope of connecting them with services – due to their age, they are eligible for care under Connecticut's child welfare system. The majority of U.S. children involved in prostitution are runaways and are past victims of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and other forms of trauma.[1] They are manipulated and coerced into prostitution by psychological, emotional, and physical means.[2]

Although Connecticut law enforcement and other officials do tend to divert these vulnerable children from the court system and refer them to needed social services, current law still allows for criminal prosecution. Under SB 153, a child could still legally be arrested, detained, charged, and prosecuted for prostitution. The Alliance supports language proposed today by Connecticut Voices for Children, which would strengthen SB 153 and better protect these vulnerable children by (1) directly stating that no child shall be prosecuted for a prostitution offense under Connecticut's penal code, (2) more directly linking child sex trafficking victims to services and protections, and (3) extending legal protections to all minors under the age of 18 (instead of 17 in SB 153).

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

2470 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport CT 06605 203-579-2727 www.ctjja.org

---

[1] Urbina, Ian. *For Runaways on the Street, Sex Buys Survival.* New York Times, Oct. 27, 2009. Section A, pg. 1.
[2] Kate Brittle, "Child Abuse by Another Name: Why the Child Welfare System is the Best Mechanism in Place to Address the Problem of Juvenile Prostitution," *Hofstra Law Review* (2008), 6, 7.