

March 2, 2011

To: Legislative Office Building  
Attn: Appropriations Committee  
300 Capitol Avenue, Room 2700  
Hartford, CT 0616

**Re: Testimony Opposing Cuts to Department of Children & Families Parole Staff**

Dear Appropriations Committee members,

Thank you for your attention and allowing me to submit my written testimonial for your review. I am sharing with you my testimonial to reflect my great concern and opposition against the proposed budget cut to reduce DCF Parole Staff (\*this can be directly referenced in the state Budget Summary under the Department of Children and Families on page B-140 under 'Recommended Significant Changes'.)

My name is Frederico Lopez. I have been actively involved and working in the Juvenile Justice field for a total of 14.5 years. During the my first 4 years, I was collaboratively working with DCF Parole Services and provided post-residential outreach services and supervision for the youth returning home in the Bridgeport community. Thereafter, I was very fortunate and afforded the opportunity to proudly join DCF Parole Services. I have been maintaining the supervision and the case management responsibilities for the adjudicated youth from my primary and assigned area of Danbury since June 2000.

After having reviewed this proposal, I question whether or not any consideration and forethought has been given to the adverse effects that this would have on the quality of services provided to our youth and their families. The primary role of a Parole social worker is to provide the direct supervision and management of case responsibilities for youth that have been adjudicated delinquent through the Juvenile Court system. Most importantly, the main underlining goal and focal point is to ensure that the treatment needs of each youth are successfully met and completed before fulfilling the permanency plan which may mean the youth being placed back home with the identified returning resource(s) or pursuing alternate placements if the said youth is dually committed to DCF regional office. After the youth is successfully discharged from a residential treatment facility, the Parole social worker maximizes the availability of community-based support and aftercare services in order to fully equip the youth and families with the tools to work towards eventually being self-sufficient. It is during this time of a youth's commitment that allows the Parole social worker to maintain frequent visits with youth and their families to ensure that they are functioning in an environment that is safe, positive and healthy. If during this period of time while in the home and community that a youth's behavior(s) presents concerns of 'safety and or risk', appropriate interventions and steps are made and fully exhausted by the Parole social worker before a final determination is made to remove the youth from the community and remand the youth to a secure facility for further stabilization and assessment. The reason that I am trying to capture this one of many facets of a Parole social worker's duties is to emphasize the necessity and significance of the quality of service that Parole social workers provide.

The quality of these services provided will be greatly affected should this proposed cut of reducing staff be approved. The reduction of staff in order to increase caseload size per worker would not allow the worker to provide the intensive attention and care that I have attested to. This quality of service must be preserved through manageable caseload numbers for each Parole social worker.

In following the timeline of events leading to this current state of matters, the budget of staff reductions in the Parole Division originated and was proposed in September 2010 by an administration that is no longer

present. The proposal was submitted at the request of Governor Rell in efforts to reduce costs by 10% prior to her departure from office. Parole social workers were the only 'direct-care workers' in DCF that were targeted as a result of not being included under the Juan F. Consent Decree which solely safeguards DCF regional social workers with feasible case load numbers. At the time the report was provided, there were a total of 290 youth and their families actively involved with an assigned Parole social worker. Since that time and 5 months later, the number of active youth and families has grown by 20% with a total number of 360 youth and their families. Another concern that needs to be considered and factored is the direct effect of the Raise the Age legislation that was effectuated in January 2010. As a result, 16 year old adjudicated delinquents from the Juvenile courts have contributed to the increase in numbers of Parole social workers' caseloads. 17 year olds are anticipated to be included in the Juvenile court system by July 2012.

Another point that I would like to present is the extreme contrast in expenses throughout a youth's court commitment period. The estimated cost of a youth being supervised in the community is \$33 per day versus the estimated cost of a youth in congregate settings (i.e. residential treatment, CT Juvenile Training School, Department of Corrections) which is \$300-\$500 per day. The reduction in workers would absolutely yield higher case loads per worker. However, workers would experience great difficulty in maintaining the same quality of services and attention that is currently provided. The absence of this level of attention from the Parole social worker will very well increase the recidivism rate with a youth's status in the community being 'at-risk' with a higher probability of that youth being remanded back to a secure facility. This is not at all cost-effective. In monitoring this increasing number of clients over time and also taking into account the growing number of adjudicated delinquent attributed by the Raise The Age legislation, the proposed reduction in staff thus yielding higher caseload per worker would directly affect the quality of treatment services being provided to each youth and their family by each Parole social worker.

The aforementioned proposal was based on the number of staff in 2009. At that time, there were a total of 47 Parole social workers and 10 Parole Supervisors. Since that time, we have lost 8 Parole social workers and 1 Supervisor. Prior to 7/1/11, there will be additional loss of staff with the anticipated retirements from state service with 1 Parole social workers and 3 Parole Supervisors. That will result in leaving a total of 38 Parole social workers and 6 Parole Supervisors. In the event that the proposed budget is passed, the number of Parole social workers will be reduced to 16 (2 of the workers who do not carry caseloads). This would ultimately leave 14 Parole social workers to cover the whole State of Connecticut within each respective area. These workers will be forced to maintain, at-best, increasing caseloads supported by the statistics of the escalating numbers of adjudicated delinquents.

As stated, the concern lies with compromising the quality of services, compromising the level of proactive involvement and the decreased opportunity to maximize the services and attention that each youth and family is entitled to from each Parole social worker, should staffing be reduced. I respectfully request that each member of the Appropriations Committee consider what is at stake as well as the long term outcome given the information provided to you. Thank you again for your time and attention on this matter.

Respectfully,

Frederico Lopez  
DCF Parole Social Worker, Danbury/Waterbury Unit  
(203) 887-1007