

Burns, Vanessa

From: joannnorman66@comcast.net
Sent: Monday, February 28, 2011 9:45 PM
To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Testimony opposing the cuts to DCF Parole Staff

February 28, 2011,

Re: Testimony opposing cuts to DCF Parole Staff

To: Appropriations Committee

Dear Appropriations Committee

My name is Joann Norman and I am a resident of the Town of Clinton. I'm a registered Democrat who strongly supported the Democratic ticket in last year's elections. I've been employed by the State of Connecticut, Department of Children and Families for almost 21 years. I have been employed as a Juvenile Parole Services Supervisor for the past eleven years, working for DCF Protective Services for nine years prior to that. I am a member of AFSCME Council 4, local 2663. After reviewing the Governor's budget proposal I have some strong concerns. In the Department of Children and Families portion of the proposal, the D.C.F. Parole Services division is in line for 22 position cuts. D.C.F. Parole Services currently has 49 Juvenile Parole Officers/Parole Supervisors. I am extremely concerned that substantial job cuts would not only decimate the department, but would also have an adverse effect on overall public safety in the State of Connecticut. D.C.F. Parole Services is responsible for the supervision and case management services of committed juvenile offenders in the State of Connecticut.

When this proposal is actually assessed in detail, it is quite alarming. With the reduction of workers being proposed, each Juvenile Parole Officer will carry a caseload of 25]+ cases. It is inevitable that supervision capabilities and treatment plan implementation will undoubtedly suffer. Individual and community safety will be directly affected by this, leaving a High Risk Population and already victimized community at continued risk. Lower caseloads offer an opportunity to offer our youth more attention and rehabilitative services while under the watchful eye of their Juvenile Parole Officer.

Over the last decade, Juvenile Justice in Connecticut has made significant gains. There has been countless resources and trainings offered to Juvenile Justice Parole Offers in the areas of Trauma Focused Treatment, Gender Specific Programing, Problem Sexual Behavior and Balanced and Restorative Justice. As a result of these recognized needs, Specialty Units have been created to best serve youth with specialized needs. All of these trainings and Treatment modalities have been sought to be proactive and treatment focused, while maintaining adjudicated youth in the least restrictive programming as possible.

All of these efforts require creativity and relationship based interactions with our clients. Youth need to develop relationships with their workers in order to gain their trust to sufficiently engage in Treatment. Large caseloads will not allow for such an opportunity. Youth are bound to get lost in the shuffle and demand crisis driven attention as opposed to proactive treatment planning.

With the current DCF proposal to the Governor, caseloads are expected to climb to 25+ cases

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per Juvenile Parole Officer. Specialty Units will no longer be able to be maintained. When you take into account the number of court appearances, two worker transports, treatment meetings, provider meetings, extensive paperwork and documentation, the youth's individualized attention and implementation of proactive Tx plans are bound to suffer.

If youth do not receive the required treatment that they need, the treatment that they were specifically committed for, they are more likely to reintegrate back into their communities with continued criminogenic behaviors, posing a direct risk to themselves and their communities.

The population of young adults that we supervise is also aging and increasing due to the "Raise the Age" law that went into effect last year. Sixteen year-old offenders are now considered juveniles. Over the last year D.C.F. Parole Services has seen a steady increase in overall numbers of committed juvenile offenders. The number of committed juvenile offenders is projected and will continue to increase. In July, 2012 the second portion of "Raise the Age" will go into effect. Seventeen year-old offenders will be considered juveniles and this will only add to the overall numbers of committed juvenile offenders in the State. The projection of the number of committed delinquents is anticipated to rise 60 percent in the next two years. In response to this, D.C.F. is hiring staff and starting construction at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. Court Support Services Division is also preparing to hire additional Probation Officers, yet, D.C.F. is looking at reducing its Parole Dept by almost half. It is expected that during these next two years, Parole staff will decrease through natural attrition. Parole has very seasoned workers, approaching their retirement. Three of the nine current existing supervisors in Parole Services plan on retiring in June of this year. Several Parole Officers will also go, with others slotted for next year. Loosing these numbers, while caseloads increase will alone create higher caseloads and challenges within our Dept.

With this older population of youth, crimes that were once recognized as "Adult charges" will now be considered "Juvenile". Make no mistake about it, they are indeed the same offenses, nothing but how they are classified has changed. Older youth tend to be more gang involved with more violent crimes. Parole has taken a charge in gang training and has several gang specialists to help work with and train their fellow Parole staff. Such opportunities may no longer exist due to the time constraints of high caseloads.

With the "Raise the Age" comes older youth with additional risk, needs and new situations. Older youth will require services such as Independent Life Skills training. Parents are not legally responsible for a youth after the age of 18. Parents will undoubtedly, as we have already seen, ask their youth to leave their homes, creating new challenges for this Dept.

The current proposal calls for a cut of 22 parole staff. Senior workers with 15 years of experience and knowledge in this field will be cut from this department, a generation and a half of experience and skill. Juvenile Parole Services appears to have been offered up as a quick solution to DCF's budget reduction challenge. In looking at the repercussions to this proposal, this in no way could have been looked at in any consequential manner, just simply numbers. Parole Services does not fall under the Juan F. Consent Degree, making it an easy target.

As a citizen of the State of Connecticut, and an employee of this state, I am greatly alarmed by the proposal to cut Juvenile Parole Services. As a Democrat, I voted for Governor Malloy in hopes that he would be creative at debt reduction. He promised to look at levels of unneeded management and said he would listen to the people. I am discouraged at his lack of follow through, so soon into his term.

Anyone could raise taxes and target the benefits and salaries of state employees. State Employees have given back already. We have negotiated in the past, and will in the future, but we should not be made

to carry the majority of the weight of the solution to a budgetary crisis that was caused by irresponsible spending, not by the state employees themselves.

I beg you to challenge Governor Malloy and the Commissioner Katz of the Dept. of Children and Families to dig deeper than a quick solution to a budget crisis. Cutting Parole Service Workers is not in the best interests of the youth that we serve, or the communities that we are charged to protect. I welcome any questions or opportunities to meet with you. This is a serious issue and a huge step backward for Juvenile Justice in the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

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