Erin Walsh, MSW

226 Stoneycrest Drive
Middletown, CT 06457

(860) 301-5650
Erin3169@aol.com

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Appropriations Committee
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: 860-240-0390

Re: Testimony Opposing the Malloy Budget Summary: Department of Children and Families page B-140; Recommend Significant Changes-Parole Services

Dear Appropriations Committee Members:

My name is Erin Walsh and I am a resident of Middletown, CT. I was born, raised and educated in the state of Connecticut-receiving both my undergraduate and graduate degrees from state universities. I have worked diligently in the social services field to provide treatment and support to the residents of Connecticut and am currently employed as a Lead Clinical Coordinator at a residential treatment facility for adolescents. I have been in this position for almost three years and due to my job responsibilities, I have worked closely with Juvenile Parole Officers across the state. As a clinical coordinator, I am responsible for providing services to and working in collaboration with parole officers in order to work with committed youth and their families to successfully reunify them and reintegrate them back into their communities.

In the treatment facility in which I am employed, we provide treatment to adolescent youth that are committed to placement through the Department of Children and Families. Over the past year, we have seen increased referrals from CSSD/Juvenile Probation which has resulted in a growth in the number of residents we treat that are committed thru parole services. In addition to this, my agency has also expanded its services to include a residential unit specifically designed to treat youth that are developmentally delayed. Throughout the past few months, we have seen an increase in the number of youth referred to this treatment specific program that have legal involvement and were subsequently placed thru juvenile parole. In addition to legal problems, these youth suffer from developmental disabilities and mental health conditions that have resulted in severe impairments in functioning and extremely disruptive behaviors. Many of these youth suffer from substance abuse issues and even in

some cases require treatment for problem sexual behaviors, which requires specific treatment and programming to target these behaviors.

As an advocate to the youth I work with and service provider to parole services, I am adamantly opposed to cutting the number of parole officers that serve these youth. Since parole officers provide input for treatment goals, attend case conference meetings, participate in on site visits with the youth, and are available in crisis and emergency situations, they are an integral part of a youth's treatment and placement in a residential facility. Cutting the number of juvenile parole officers will create constraints in regards to communication and availability. This will result in increased caseloads, making collaborative efforts more difficult. I have many times experienced state employees overwhelmed with case management responsibilities and/or crisis situations due to increased caseloads. As a result of this, workers have failed to participate in meetings and had to cancel site visits for their assigned youth, creating lapses in treatment and disappointment, anxiety and feelings of frustration for the youth. Working with these youth to provide intensive treatment demands consistent collaboration and eliminating parole officers would negatively impact this. The more involved and available a parole officer is, the greater the opportunity for effective and child specific treatment. When appropriate and consistent treatment is offered to these youth and their families, there is a greater chance for success upon return to the community. Parole officers also play a significant role in integrating youth back into the community after treatment at residential placements. They work collaboratively with outreach and tracking workers and outpatient providers to ensure aftercare services are in place and adequate for the youth and their families. Therefore, cutting parole officers within the state will increase caseloads and place constraints on time and efforts allocated to collaborating with service providers. This will impact treatment and increase a youth's chances of recidivism once returned to their home and the community (which will ultimately result in future incarceration at CJTS or Manson Youth Institute).

In conclusion, I hope you take into consideration the impact that cutting parole officers will have on the youth and families in which they serve as well as the communities that they return to.

Thank you for your time,
Erin Walsh, MSW
Clinical Coordinator
(860) 301-5650