

Re: Testimony Opposing Cuts to DCF Parole Staff

Dear Appropriations Committee,

My name is Michael Binion. I have been employed by the State of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) for 16 years. I worked as a Child Protection Social Worker for 11.5 years and then transferred to my current position as a Juvenile Parole Officer/Social Worker in DCF's Juvenile Justice Division approximately 4.5 years ago.

I am writing this letter as my co-workers and I are very concerned regarding the Governor's proposed budget which calls for the reduction of 22 Juvenile Parole Staff. This staff reduction stems from Governor Rell's call to reduce DCF costs by 10% last year. DCF's Juvenile Parole Division was the only division targeted for the agency's entire cost reduction. It is our belief that the Juvenile Parole Division was targeted as it does not fall under the Juan F Consent Decree which means there is not any federal oversight regarding the size of our caseloads. This proposal does not account for recent staffing changes due to attrition or the expected influx of cases subsequent to the Raise the Age legislation.

Our division understands the need to reduce costs; however, we believe that the recommended staff reductions will compromise public safety and ultimately increase spending due to increased incarcerations. Our caseloads are currently such that we are able to form relationships with our clients and their families. We implement a multitude of support services and meet regularly with our clients in an effort to preserve their community placements. We are concerned that we will not be able to provide the same level of care, support, and supervision if this budget passes.

The statistical breakdown of the proposed staff reduction is as follows:

The reduction of 22 Parole Staff is based on an assessment of 2009 staff to client ratios. In 2009, there were 47 Parole Officers/Social Workers and 10 Parole Supervisors/Social Work Supervisors. Since 2009, our division lost 8 Parole Officers/Supervisors and 1 Parole Supervisor/Social Work Supervisor position. Additionally, 3 more Supervisors and 1 more Parole Officer/Social Worker will be retiring by July of 2011. Our division will have 16 Parole Officers, 2 of which do not carry a caseload, to cover the entire state if this budget passes.

In terms of caseloads, there were 290 Parolees when this staff reduction was proposed in 10/10. As of 2/25/11, there are 360 Parolees. This is a 20% increase in four months and the caseloads are rising daily. We have also seen an increase of youths with severe criminal histories (gang

involvement, weapons, violent crimes). This is a high-risk population with intensive needs that will not be serviced appropriately if our division is decimated by this proposal.

The second phase of the aforementioned Raise the Age legislation will be effective in 7/12. The anticipated increase in the Juvenile Parole population subsequent to Raise the Age is 60%. This increase would result in a caseload ratio of 30 Parolees to 1 Juvenile Parole Officer/Social Worker. The resulting workload would not be manageable as Juvenile Parole Officers/Social Workers will be expected to make face to face contact with 30 clients and complete the required documentation (Treatment Plans, Court studies, Case Activity Notes, etc.) in a timely fashion. The quality of these contacts will be compromised due to the anticipated time restraints associated with an extremely high caseload.

This budget will precipitate Parolee to Parole Officer/Social Worker ratios that will make it extremely difficult to maintain our clients in the community. Consequently, more Parolees will end up in congregate care settings such as residential treatment facilities or our most secure setting, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). The cost to supervise a youth in the community is approximately \$33 per day while it costs \$350-\$560/day for in-state residential treatment centers and \$774/day per youth at CJTS.

We feel strongly that our division has been fiscally responsible and mindful of the state's financial difficulties as we have not filled any of the positions lost to attrition over the past 2 years. We are concerned that this budget has not examined cost-effective savings beyond a reduction of front line staff. More specifically, there is an abundance of non-caseload supervising managers who continue to collect large salaries despite little to no impact on our clients; however, they appear to be immune to state layoffs. We respectfully ask that this matter be examined further.

Finally, many of our Juvenile Parole Officers/Social Workers have seniority within our union, which includes Child Protection Social Workers. While our 22 Parole Officers/Social Workers will be laid off, they will have the ability to 'bump' Child Protection Social Workers with less seniority. This will result in added spending to provide Child Protection training to the staff in question and, regrettably, 22 Child Protection Social Workers will lose their jobs.

Given the aforementioned information, I humbly ask that the Appropriations Committee re-examine the fiscal and public safety implications of this budget.

I greatly appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Michael Binion, DCF Juvenile Parole Officer/Social Worker