

2/27/2011

To: Appropriations Committee:

I would first of all like to thank the Appropriations Committee for accepting this testimony and allowing the people the opportunity to be heard. My name is Peggy Wajdowicz and I have been a state employee for well over 33 years. I am a DCF Social Work Supervisor/Parole Supervisor and am sending this testimony in opposition of the DCF Budget Proposal to Increase Parole Caseloads with the associated reduction of 22 Parole staff. This item is located in the Governor's Budget Summary under the Department of Children and Families on page B-140 under Recommended Significant Changes.

This proposal to cut Parole Officers/Social Workers related to 2009 numbers. This does not take into consideration positions lost by attrition, with no rehires. If the budget passes it still says to reduce the staff by 22, and does not consider current staffing or changes in staffing due to planned retirements or the expected influx of cases related to **RAISE THE AGE** legislation. It makes no conclusions as to how many Parole Officers/Social Workers or Supervisors there should be in the Department. This was an arbitrary recommendation made by the previous DCF administration based on their requirement to cut the DCF budget. Parole was targeted because we are not a part of the Consent decree which means there is no federal oversight for caseload size. The decision was made without any understanding of the role and impact Parole Officers/Social Workers have on the youth and families we serve, the relationships we have with these youth that help support them in treatment, rehabilitation, and family and community reintegration. It does not consider the progress that has been made over the years as the Parole Department has expanded to meet the needs of youth with complicated behavioral, mental health, and family issues. We are intensely involved with both youth and their families. They know there is someone there that cares, is honest, consistent, and supportive, and will be there for them.

Let's look at the numbers. In 2009 we had 47 Parole Officers/Social Workers and 10 Parole Supervisors/Social Work Supervisors. Since that time we have lost through attrition 8 Parole Officers/Social Work Positions and 1 Supervisor position. These positions have not been refilled. That leaves currently 39 Parole Officers and 9 Supervisors.

Prior to 7/1/2011 we will have 3 additional supervisors retiring and 1 Parole Officer/Social Worker retiring. So by 7/1/2011 there will be 38 Parole Officers instead of 47 and there will be 6 Supervisors instead of 10.

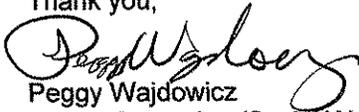
If the budget passes and it still says to cut 22 parole staff, that would mean 38 minus 22 which would leave only 16 workers, 2 of which are non caseload carrying due to other duties (Intake and Parole Review Board). That would leave 14 workers to cover the whole state. This would take us back to the stone age and negate all the progress we have made over the years in providing the best services for our youth and their families. It would eliminate Units, that specialize in Gender Specific Programming for Girls, who work intensely with this very needy population which requires lower caseloads. It would also eliminate a Specialized Unit of workers for Sex Offenders. These Units and the ones that have only males are specialized and are experienced in these unique populations. It would increase caseloads to at least 2 ½ times Regional CPS Caseloads. There is no way we would be able to give the level of service and support we now give to our youth and families. Providers would not get the current level of support and presence as there is today. Community Safety would be jeopardized.

With the RAISE THE AGE legislation 16 year olds are now treated in the Juvenile System. 17 year olds will soon be added to the Juvenile System. There is also legislation that will give DCF Parole jurisdiction over youth until the age of 20, instead of 18. All of this will increase caseloads dramatically. To cut 22 Parole positions makes no sense when CSSD and CJTS are gearing up

for the **RAISE THE AGE** and have gotten approval to add staff. ***Without the intense supervision we now provide to these youth and their families, more youth will be incarcerated at a huge cost to the state.*** It would also jeopardize community safety adversely affecting the safety of the average citizen, as well as the lives of these youth and their futures.

I ask that you please consider advocating for the removal of this line item from the budget for the sake of the children and families we serve. These kids are sometimes a danger to the community, but other times they are more a danger to themselves. They need the compassion, consistency, support, and regular contact that we are providing and need to continue to provide.

Thank you,



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