

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

RE: HB-06380 DCF Proposed Budget - Significant Changes to Parole Services

Thank you for accepting my testimony and an opportunity to be heard. My name is Saralyn Savage Levesque and I am a resident of East Haddam, CT. I attended Southern Connecticut State University and obtained a degree in School Health Education. As a result, I maintain a valid CT teaching certificate for Health Education grades Pre-K through 12. I have been employed by the State of Connecticut, Department of Children and Families for seventeen years. I am a member of AFSCME Council 4, local 2663.

After reviewing last week's budget proposal by Governor Malloy I have some grave concerns. In the D.C.F. portion of the proposal the D.C.F. Parole Services division is looking at 22 position cuts for caseload carrying staff. D.C.F. Parole Services currently has 49 Juvenile Parole Officers/Parole Supervisors. It is important to note that this proposal was made last year by previous DCF Administration under former Governor Rell's call to reduce costs by 10%. I am extremely concerned that substantial job cuts would not only decimate my department but would also have an adverse affect on overall public safety in the State of Connecticut.

D.C.F. Parole Services provides supervision/services to committed juvenile offenders and covers the entire State of Connecticut. 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. With that change came a standing that 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. We have seen a twenty percent increase in the past four months alone. The number of committed juvenile offenders will continue to increase due to Raise the Age and proposed legislation related to DCF Parole Services supervising youth until age twenty rather than age eighteen. 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 increase the overall numbers of committed juvenile offenders in the State of Connecticut.

My department will also see the overall number of Juvenile Parole Officers/Supervisor decrease due to attrition. It is important to note that the number of committed juvenile offenders will continue to increase substantially over the next two years. Superior Court

Judges are much more inclined to commit sixteen and seventeen year old offenders. A very high percentage are gang involved and have failed in all of the services available to them in the juvenile probation system. The proposal to cut D.C.F. Juvenile Parole Officers/Supervisors was poorly thought out and short sighted.

Over the past seven years, I have mainly supervised the Girl's Services Unit within Parole Services. This is a highly trained group of professionals skilled at gender-informed relational programming. We take great pride in the rapport we build with these young ladies and their families. We act as their mentors, advocates, confidantes and role models. We are the last stop before the adult system for many of these youth and we do our best to help guide them and provide them with the skills they will need to make positive and healthy life choices. The Girl's Team does it's best each and every day to maintain youth and community safety while balancing youth accountability through an array of small programs throughout CT. We continue to do this without a state run state facility which is often times a difficult task. This proposal would eliminate more than half of our highly specialized unit who has worked together as a tight knit group since it's inception seven years ago.

As a divisions, we are charged with the responsibility of providing supervision and oversight of treatment of all youth who have been committed delinquent by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters in the State of CT. A reduction of staff would result in union bumping rights being exercised and Parole Services staff bumping into Child Protective Services positions. This would ultimately cost the state of CT more money since staff would need to go through in-service training as would a new hire. The Parole Services division is the only division targeted in the budget proposal which is likely due to the fact that we are not under the Juan F. Consent Decree.

As a resident of CT and employee of this fine state, I am confused and dismayed. Taking the approach of looking in as a certified teacher and Parole Services Supervisor, I don't believe this proposal at all considers the health and potential benefits the youth of CT are entitled to. These youth have often times been pushed through the system and grade levels and haven't been given the fair chance their privileged counterparts have been afforded. As Parole Services staff we work closely with community providers and school systems to help get these youth back on track and open the door to a whole host of new opportunities and positive life experiences. It is not uncommon for a former client to reach out to our staff years later with success stories and invitations to college graduations. I am afraid that this proposed reduction of approximately half of our staff will drastically increase caseloads ultimately impacting the level of care and commitment our clients and their families will receive. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Saralyn Savage Levesque, Juvenile Parole Supervisor

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