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From: Stacey Pettinato [staceypettinato@yahoo.com]
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To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Testimony in opposition of the DCF Budget Proposal to reduce 22 Parole staff

February 28, 2011

I would first like to thank the Appropriations Committee for accepting my testimony and allowing the people to be heard. My name is Stacey Pettinato and I have been employed by the State of Connecticut as a gender specific (female population) DCF Parole Social Worker for over seven years. I am a member of AFSCME Council 4, local 2663. I am submitting this testimony in opposition of the DCF Budget Proposal to Increase Parole Caseloads with the associated reduction of 22 Parole staff, which is located in the Governor's Budget Summary under the Department of Children and Families on page B-140 under Recommended Significant Changes.

After reviewing Governor Malloy's recent budget proposal, I have some significant concerns that this proposal was poorly thought out and short sighted. Parole services currently employs 49 Juvenile Parole Officers/Parole Supervisors. This division is responsible for providing supervision and overseeing the treatment to all youth who have been committed as delinquent by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters in the State of Connecticut .

The proposal mentioned above was created on approximately 9/1/10, by DCF administration that is no longer employed by the Department. The proposal was a response to Governor Rell's call to reduce costs by 10% last year. The parole division was the only division targeted for the entire DCF cost reduction due to the fact that it does not fall under the Juan F. Consent Decree.

At the time of this proposal, parole was providing services to 290 youth and their families. As of 2/25/11, Parole is servicing 360 youth and their families. This is a 20% increase over the past four months, and our population is continuing to rise on a daily basis. Of the current 40 Parole Social Workers, and 9 Parole Social Work Supervisors, there will be 3 people from each job class retiring by 7/1/11. This will leave 37 Parole Social Workers (of which two are non case load carrying) and 6 Parole Supervisors to supervise the entire state.

If the budget is passed there will be an additional 22 staff eliminated from the division. This will leave 15 parole social workers and 6 parole supervisors to cover the entire state of Connecticut , with a parole social worker to client ratio of 36:1.

Projected retirements in 2012 consist of 1 Parole Social Work Supervisor and 6 Parole Social Workers, leaving 9 Parole Social Workers and 5 Parole Supervisors for a total

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staff of 14. These retirements alone over the next 2 years will equal savings without making any cuts and sacrificing the progress and gains that the Department has made in servicing the youth, families and communities of Connecticut to date.

Our daily increase in population is partly due to the recent Raise the Age Legislature. The second phase of the plan is scheduled to take effect in July 2012 with the addition of 17 year old offenders being treated in the juvenile system. This comes with an anticipated increase of 60-65% in the parole population. If our current number (360) stayed the same and didn't grow, a 60% increase would be 576 youth and their families. This increase would make the caseload ratio of youth to Parole social workers in July 2012 64:1. Both of these numbers 36:1 and 64:1 would make completing mandated tasks impossible.

We have seen trends among the older clients including increased gang activity, weapons involvement, and felony arrests. If this budget cut is approved, it will be impossible for the remaining parole staff to adequately provide support to the residentials, and supervision to the clients. It will force the division to be crisis driven with an inevitable increase in incarcerations, ultimately costing the state more money. This reduction will have a direct negative impact on the youth and families we serve as well as public safety.

Based on seniority (ranging from 5 years to 15 years), twenty two P-2 staff members would be forced to replace twenty two Child Protective Services Social Workers. These staff members would need to be trained in Protective Services, costing the state additional time and money. It also means that currently trained staff in CPS would loose their jobs.

Clearly the proposed reduction in staff would not allow staff to provide adequate care to the children in our custody. The remaining trimmed down parole staff would be incapable of successfully carrying out their full duties with the quality and commitment that the community is accustomed to.

The parole division has recently spent millions of dollars on the implementation of a new Youth Compass and Treatment Plan. This is a complex needs and risks assessment tool which will not be utilized to its full capacity with the proposed reduction in staff. The time and money that the State of CT has already devoted to this cause will be wasted.

Other disciplines in the juvenile justice system (CSSD, Detentions and CJTS) are being proactive in preparing for the more demanding and increased population that we will be serving as a result of the Raise the Age Legislature. It is counter productive and irresponsible for DCF to not only neglect to plan for this increased population, but to obliterate a specific division of trained professionals that are already equipped to work with this dynamic population.

I hope it is now clear to you, that if you support this proposed cut of 22 Parole Staff, it will not only be contradictory to the goals that were identified by the Raise the Age Legislature, but that it will ultimately cost the State of CT more money in the long run. Community safety will be in jeopardy, quality of service to our youth and families will be compromised and any headway that we have made in providing treatment to juvenile offenders, will be lost.

Thank you for your time.

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