

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6325 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE REENTRY AND EDUCATION

February 23, 2011

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. Through our TeamChild Juvenile Justice Project, the Center represents children in securing appropriate educational programming and improving academic outcomes by reducing high suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates.

We strongly support Raised Bill No. 6325, *An Act Concerning Juvenile Reentry and Education*, which will improve educational outcomes for youth at risk of dropping out after juvenile or criminal justice placements. While in placement, these youth attend school in the Unified School District #1 ("USD #1") and the Unified School District #2 ("USD #2").¹ Raised Bill No. 6325 will improve these youths' educational outcomes by ensuring that:

1. Students are immediately enrolled in school upon their return to the community;
2. Educational records follow students to receiving school districts by a date certain;
3. Students' credits earned while attending USD #2 are accepted by receiving school districts, just like the credits earned by students attending USD #1 currently are;
4. Students are allowed to return to the school they attended prior to placement, if grade level appropriate; and
5. Students do not face expulsion for the behavior that resulted in their placement.

Students who return to the community from placement are at high risk for educational failure and dropping out. Many of these students experienced significant educational failure prior to their placements and, on average, are considerably below grade level in reading with high rates of special needs.² Stressors during their transitions to the community aggravate their past educational failure.³ Consequently, these students are much more likely to drop out, and national studies estimate that more than 66% of these students do not complete high school.⁴



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¹ USD #1 provides educational services to youth in the custody of the Department of Corrections, while USD #2 provides educational services to youth in the custody of the Department of Children and Families. The Unified School Districts are subject to the same oversight by the State Department of Education as any other Connecticut school district. CONN. GEN. STAT. §10-15d.

² See, e.g., Feierman, Jessica, et al., *The School-To-Prison Pipeline... and Back: Obstacles and Remedies for the Re-Enrollment of Adjudicated Youth*, 54 New York Law School Law Review 1115, 1123.

³ Brock, Leslie and Natalie Keegan, *Students Highly At Risk of Dropping Out: Returning to School After Incarceration*, available at: <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/spotlight200701b.asp>.

⁴ See Feierman, *supra* note 2 at 1117.

Failure to transfer records and credits in a timely manner exacerbates that risk. Without records from a student's past educational placement, schools often do not provide appropriate educational programming, particularly for students with individual education programs. Additionally, failure to accept credits earned by students in placement encourages students to believe that their efforts in school have been futile. Moreover, these students often face barriers to enrollment or to returning to their prior school, which make them feel less connected to school.⁵

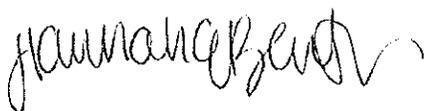
Raised Bill No. 6325 is a no-cost way to reduce the risk of educational failure for these students. Connecticut law already requires receiving school districts to request these students' educational records; Raised Bill No. 6325 only creates a clear timeline for that request. Connecticut law already requires receiving school districts to accept credits earned by students while attending USD #1; school districts should not incur additional cost for accepting credits for coursework already completed by students while attending USD #2. Connecticut law already requires receiving school districts to promptly enroll students; Raised Bill No. 6325 just makes that standard explicit.

Although Raised Bill No. 6325 is a good start towards these goals, it should be amended to **apply the same timeline for receiving school districts to notify USD #1 and USD #2 of a new student's enrollment as for other districts, so that this timeline is two days regardless of the school district the student last attended.** Raised Bill No. 6325 should also be amended to **clarify that students can waive the right to return to a prior school, if they do not think that attending a different school is in their best interest.**

By reducing barriers to educational transition, ensuring that students' educational programming reflects the progress that they have made while in placement and promoting school connectedness for transitioning students, Raised Bill No. 6325 will help achieve better life outcomes for Connecticut's youth. For the foregoing reasons, we urge the committee to pass Raised Bill No. 6325.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Hannah Benton
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⁵ Research shows that children who are connected to school tend to have higher grades and test scores and are also less likely to exhibit aggressive or self-destructive behaviors. See, e.g., Blum, Robert, *School Connectedness: Improving Students' Lives*, available at: http://www.jhsph.edu/bin/ife/MCI_Monograph_FINAL.pdf.