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TESTIMONY OF CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES, INC. IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6325, AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE RE-ENTRY AND EDUCATION

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Melanie Starks and I am a staff attorney with the Children-at-Risk unit of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS). CLS represents families of children and youth who are having difficulty accessing educational and/or behavioral health services.

I am here today to urge you to support H.B. 6325, An Act Concerning Juvenile Re-Entry and Education. This bill would require (1) the enrollment of students transferring from USD #1 and USD#2 back to a local school district to be *immediate* and *to the same school the students attended prior to leaving*; (2) acceptance of credit for instruction at USD #2 schools; and (3) require districts to allow students to return from detention centers or residential facilities without expelling them for additional time.

When students leave CJTS, juvenile detention, or a residential placement, they face many challenges. They are moving, sometimes returning home to their families, sometimes not. In their attempts to get back to a normal life, they must deal with parole and probation officers, DCF workers, public defenders, and school administrators. As you would imagine, this is more often than not, a difficult transition. In our work at CLS, we have seen firsthand the obstacles these students face when they are trying to return to school.

We have worked with students who were told upon return to their school districts from CJTS that the school they had previously attended was full and they must re-register with central office and would be placed at some other school in the district. Some districts require all students returning from CJTS or other residential placements to spend a period of time attending an alternative school before they are allowed to return to the school they previously attended. And finally, some students have returned to school only to face expulsion hearings. As the statute is drafted currently, a student who was in juvenile detention for 160 school days could then be expelled by his or her local school system for another 180 school days.

As you can imagine, these situations can be incredibly discouraging for students and their families. Where we are involved, we can help a student navigate these obstacles but for many students this can mean never getting back into school.



It is clear. When students face multiple barriers to school re-entry after an out of district placement they are likely to become discouraged and drop out of school entirely. Ultimately, if our goal is to encourage these students to finish high school, then we must not permit these types of artificial barriers.

This bill's purpose is to remove such barriers to re-entry for our state's most vulnerable students.

We therefore urge the Education Committee to support **HB 6325, An Act Concerning Juvenile Re-Entry and Education**. I thank you for your consideration.