



## State of Connecticut

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### TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE PERRA RAPILLO EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
FEBRUARY 23, 2011

### RAISED BILL NO. 6325 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE REENTRY AND EDUCATION

The Office of the Chief Public Defender supports passage of **Raised Bill No. 6325, An Act Concerning Juvenile Reentry and Education**. This bill increases a child's chance at successfully reintegrating into the community after being placed at a DCF facility. The proposal requires that a student will be able to speedily reenter their school when leaving a DCF or Department of Correction facility. It mandates timely provision of educational records to the receiving school when a child transfers from one district to another and ensures that all children receive credit for work done at schools run by DCF. Similar language is contained in **Raised Bill No. 846, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Educational Credits**. The bill also improves a child's chance for school achievement by requiring a school district to count his time in placement towards a suspension or expulsion based on the behavior that led to the child's placement. The Office of the Chief Public Defender believes that adoption of this language is essential to ensure that children who reenter school from a DCF facility are given the best chance of succeeding.

**Section 1** will require a school district to immediately enroll a child who is leaving Unified School District # 1, which includes all Department of Corrections facilities or Unified School District #2, which includes schools at all facilities run by the Department of Children and Families. Immediate school attendance is critical to a child's success when reintegrating into the community after a being removed by the child welfare juvenile justice or criminal justice systems. Students and families find it difficult to navigate local school board bureaucracy, and it is too easy for local schools to dissuade children from returning to school by making it difficult for them to reenroll. Study after study shows that children who attend school and are engaged in

their education are much less likely to return to the child welfare or criminal justice systems than their counterparts who drop out. A requirement that schools immediately enroll kids returning from state facilities will encourage the schools to work with the state agencies responsible for the child's reentry to plan for a successful return.

**Section 2** speeds up the transfer of records between school districts, including USD #1 and #2 when a student transfers. These records are critical to educators who are responsible for creating a child's educational plan and must be moved with all reasonable speed between the sending and receiving school. Children should not have to wait weeks for records to arrive before they are placed in appropriate educational programming.

**Section 2** also ensures that students leaving USD#2 will receive credit for work done while in placement with DCF. Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-220h already requires school districts to grant credit for work done while a student is enrolled in Unified School District #1. This must be expanded to give the same credit to children in returning home from a commitment to DCF. The State of Connecticut spends thousands of dollars educating children who are placed at DCF facilities and thus attending schools run by Unified School District #2. However the children are often denied credit for course work done at the Connecticut Children's Place, Riverview Hospital or the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). These children often make significant advances while attending school in a facility. For example, the average child committed to CJTS **gains a full year of academic progress in reading and math** while committed to the facility. Credit transfer for work done in these facilities should be mandatory and automatic. Children returning from DCF facility should clearly be accorded the same educational rights as youth reentering the community from the Department of Corrections.

**Section 3** eliminates double expulsion for children who are sent to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. Some children are committed to DCF and placed at CJTS or another facility for a crime that also carries the possibility of expulsion from school. Some school districts are holding off on expelling students until they attempt to return to school after serving their commitment. These are students who have already been removed from the school community by the court, usually for a full school year. Students who are returning home have received treatment and rehabilitation and need to be able to attend school to continue their positive progress. It is simply not fair to allow schools to hold off on an expulsion while a child serves his or her sentence and use it later to exclude him or her from school upon release. The expulsion and the sentence should run at the same time. It is always the goal of the juvenile justice system to return the child to the community as a successful and productive member. This cannot happen if the child is excluded from school upon release.

The Office of the Chief Public Defender urges passage of this bill and thanks the committee for raising these important issues.