



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6499
Maria Lamb, Director of the Family Support Center at CT Renaissance in
Bridgeport, CT
March 7, 2011

Good afternoon, my name is Maria Lamb and I am the Director of the Family Support Center (FSC) in Bridgeport, CT. One of the FSC's primary responsibilities is to work with FWSN-Truancy referred clients in order to enhance their academic functioning, by increasing school performance, attendance, and at times, behavior.

1. The first reason why it is important to institute a timeline in FWSN filing by schools is because it will ensure students get access to our services more quickly.

We refer these clients to a group called "PASS," which stands for "Promoting Adolescent Skills and Strengths," an eight-week gender-specific educational group whose purpose is to teach basic and necessary life skills to apply to the immediate goal of improved school attendance and performance. Throughout our client's time in PASS, we are in constant contact with school personnel to assess any changes in his or her school functioning. It is incredibly important that clients are able to immediately implement their new skills in an academic setting. The more practice clients receive in applying their knowledge from PASS to school, the more likely they will be successful in using these skills in the long term. The most challenging situation is when we deal with clients who were referred in the spring, participated in our summer programming during their break, and then had to wait until the fall to put into practice their new skill set. As you can imagine, these students are at a serious disadvantage because of this initial delay in accessing our services.

2. The second reason why it is important to institute a timeline is because it will help students retain hope in their future success in school.

It has been our experience that hope is essential for clients in order for them to initiate and sustain positive changes in behavior at school. Unfortunately, if we get a referral after a student has been absent for thirty or more days then it is unlikely they will be able to pass the rest of the year. Despite what clients think (which is usually that they will have a "clean start" for the next new school year), this delay in learning and lack of connection to the school does not usually diminish come fall. If anything, longer periods of time away of school make it all the more difficult for students to return.

3. The third reason why it is important to institute a timeline is so guardians have an opportunity to work with school personnel on addressing this issue.

If the FSC receives the referral earlier in the school year then we are able to work with the client's guardian on preparing for school meetings, establishing a school contact and

learning about his/her child's educational rights. However, the later in the year we receive the referral, the less time we have to work with, and support, the guardian in developing a new relationship with his or her child's school.

For the reasons I mentioned above, I believe this bill will help decrease the amount of repeat offenders, as students will be able to apply new skills immediately and therefore see results, and increase positive communication between home and school. I am also confident the school system will benefit from this bill as they will receive support from community providers earlier in the process. That said, I would like to thank the Education Committee for providing me with an opportunity to voice my support for this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Maria Lamb
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