

## *Center for Children's Advocacy*

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### **TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISING THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AGE IN HOUSE BILL 6585.**

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal 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. The Center supports the provisions in Raised Bill 6585 relating to the high school dropout age for the following 2 reasons:

#### 1. This bill will make it more difficult for students to drop out

Drop outs have identified "too much freedom" as a key factor that enabled them to drop out of school. This bill would dramatically reduce that freedom.<sup>i</sup> 74 percent of those respondents regret dropping out of school since it is linked with many negative outcomes including an increased chance of unemployment, increased involvement with the welfare and legal systems and reduced earning potential.<sup>ii</sup>

It is recognized that students who are struggling academically, have little parental involvement and are frequently absent, are more likely to drop out of school.<sup>iii</sup> Schools now are required to file Families With Service Needs (FWSN) petitions after the failure of parental participation and community interventions to address the problem of truancy. FWSN petitions provide a basis for responding to the needs of children exhibiting misbehavior in a non-delinquent manner by making available services which may include; referrals to family support centers, enhanced educational advocacy, mental health services, afterschool programs, parenting classes, and other supports to students in need. Making school attendance mandatory until 18 would allow children to retain access to these services that are critical to keeping them engaged and involved with their school communities. By raising the age, educators would have more time to work with the students to show them that there are more opportunities if they do have an education. Raising the age would also give those considering dropping out time to develop more mature judgment and make the very real connection between graduating and their future earning capacity.

#### 2. This bill will help combat the "push-out" of struggling students.

Connecticut law guarantees public high school education to all students through the age of 18 and to most through the age of 21.<sup>iv</sup> The law also makes adult education available to anyone who is at least 16.<sup>v</sup> Push-out occurs when public high schools persuade or coerce students and their families into withdrawing voluntarily from school and transferring to adult education.

Students who are pushed out tend to be those who are already struggling in high school – those with behavior issues, poor attendance, or significant academic failures. While it may seem reasonable for schools to suggest that these students try other options, the fact is that young people who have trouble engaging at mainstream high schools – where guidance counselors and

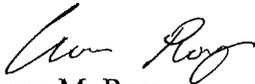
social workers actively work to help them participate – do worse in adult education, where students are expected to be mature and self-motivated.

According to the State Department of Education, many of our state's largest cities have enough 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds in adult education to populate whole high schools.<sup>vi</sup> Those numbers reflect only students who attended at least 12 hours of adult education instruction. Students who quit before completing 12 hours or who never reported to adult education after transferring out of regular high school are not counted by the State Department of Education.

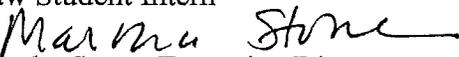
Adult education has neither the same academic rigor nor the breadth of services, including special education, which regular high schools must provide. Research has shown that younger students tend not to do as well in adult education as their older peers.<sup>vii</sup> This is especially so for students who have had behavior problems in regular high schools. Many of them would likely benefit from more support through special education or other interventions, not from the reduced structure and additional responsibility of the adult education environment.

Our state's adult education programs are ill-suited to serve as de facto high schools. Across the nation, 20 states, including Ohio and Tennessee, and the District of Columbia have passed laws that require compulsory attendance until age 18. Eleven other states have raised the dropout age to 17 and a half-dozen other states have legislation in progress that would raise their respective dropout age.<sup>viii</sup> At 16 years-old, students are far from having finished their prescribed academic curriculum. By keeping these children in school until 18, we watch out for the best interests of children who otherwise might be drawn to the appeal of an early exit from regular education.

Respectfully Submitted,



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<sup>i</sup> Bloom & Haskins, *The Future of Children*, Policy Brief Spring 2010, *Helping High School Dropouts Improve Their Prospects*, pgs. 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Baker & Nugent, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, *Truancy Reduction: Keeping kids in School* (2001). In 2005, high school dropouts earned \$15,700 less than adults with a high school degree, and over \$35,000 less than those with a two-year degree. This earnings difference between a dropout and someone with only a high school degree can amount to over \$700,000 in the span of a forty-five year career. Bloom & Haskins, *The Future of Children*, Policy Brief Spring 2010, *Helping High School Dropouts Improve Their Prospects*, pgs. 1-2. It is estimated that the group of students who drop out each year cost the United States \$200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and taxes, while the estimated annual cost of providing for them and their families is approximately \$76 billion a year, or \$800 per taxpayer. National Association of School Psychologists, *School Completion and Student Engagement*, pg. S2-65 (2004).

<sup>iii</sup> *Id.* at S2-66.

<sup>iv</sup> Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-220(a)(3).

<sup>v</sup> Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-67.

<sup>vi</sup> In the 2008-9 school year, New Haven had 526 such students in academic adult education courses (i.e., classes not designed to teach English as a second language or prepare students to take the United States citizenship exam. In the same year, Waterbury had 516, Hartford had 367, Bridgeport had 256, and New Britain had 238, State Dept. of Education Statistics 2009.

<sup>vii</sup> See C. Harrison, "Managing Disruptive Student Behavior in Adult Basic Education," ERIC Digest No. 54 (1986), available at [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/2f/62/dc.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/2f/62/dc.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> See Education Commission of the States report, "Compulsory School Age Requirements," (2010), available at <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/educ/ECSCCompulsoryAge.pdf>.