

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN GILL,
DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SERVICES,
CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY PROGRAMS OF CONNECTICUT,
TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6325
AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE REENTRY AND EDUCATION**

February 23, 2011

Students returning to community schools from juvenile and criminal justice placements are at an extremely high risk for educational failure. Before these students enter placement, they tend to have high rates of special needs and reading levels significantly below grade level, which puts these kids already at risk for dropping out.

While returning to community, these students encounter further problems that greatly increase their risk of educational failure. When these students try to enroll, they often face administrative barriers which result in a delay of their enrollment. Such a delay not only diminishes a student's sense of connection to school, but it can also reduce his or her desire to return to school since the student may believe that the district does not want him or her back.

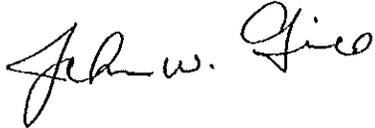
Even when students are able to enroll, these students continue to face barriers to academic success. First, because educational records are not always transferred immediately from their prior placements, these students often do not receive the services they need to receive in school. This causes students to become very frustrated with school. Second, students can be crushed by the refusal of their community schools to accept credits earned while attending the Unified School District #2 (USD #2), which educates kids in juvenile justice placements. This refusal encourages a student to believe that hard work in school is not rewarded, which makes it more likely that a student will decide to drop out. Particularly since school districts are required to accept credits for students who are educated in Unified School District #1 (USD #1) while in criminal justice placements, it does not make any sense to deny students credits earned while in USD #2. Third, students who face discipline for the behaviors that led to their juvenile justice placements may also develop a sense of futility. While in placement, these kids have worked on accepting responsibility for their actions and on preventing future involvement with the court system. To be excluded from school for that same behavior feels like their progress is not valued.

Raised Bill No. 6325 provides solutions to these problems. Raised Bill No. 6325 requires the immediate enrollment of students leaving placement and that these students receive credits for their school work completed in placement. Because this bill clearly outlines the timeline for requesting records from prior educational placements, it speeds up the process for students to receive the services they need to thrive in the classroom. Finally, students will not be excluded for their prior behavior, behavior that has already been addressed through their placement in the juvenile or criminal justice system. All of these provisions combine to improve

the educational transition for students returning from placement, making them more likely to remain in school.

This bill is a great start to achieving these goals, but it can be improved by two small amendments. First, the bill currently creates two timelines for receiving school districts to request educational records: one timeline when the prior school district is USD #1 or USD #2 and another for any other school district. This should be amended so that the timeline is two days regardless of the prior school district. What would be even more efficient, and beneficial for students is if the student entered their new placement with their educational record. Thorough review of the record at registration time would make scheduling and planning efficient. Second, for a variety of reasons, students and parents may decide that attending their prior school is not in their best interest and they should be able to make a decision, in consultation with the school district, that an alternate school placement is necessary. This decision should be based on student grade, special interest and skills, and availability.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. Gill". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

JOHN W. GILL