



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 7, 2011

Supporting

HB 6499: AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO THE
EDUCATION STATUTES

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee: This testimony is submitted by Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance) Steering Committee. The Alliance is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocates a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

The Alliance supports House Bill 6499 which would require Connecticut school districts to file FWSNs within 30 days of the failure of parental participation and community interventions to alleviate the absences of an identified truant student. This requirement would reduce truancy rates by enabling truant students to obtain access to services more quickly. These services include: referral to Family Support Centers, educational advocacy, mental health services, afterschool programs, parenting classes, and other supports.

Addressing and reversing truancy early results in diversion away from the juvenile justice system and better educational outcomes. One of Connecticut's most successful preventative efforts to divert youth from the juvenile justice system is the Families With Services Needs (FWSN) system, which provides a full array services to status offenders and their families. **According to the Judicial Branch, truancy accounts for about 40% of all FWSN referrals.** School success, including attendance, is a critical predictor in terms of long-term success in life, including staying out of the juvenile and adult justice systems. It is crucial that we identify youth who are truant early on in order to get them proper services to prevent further absences and disengagement from school.

Raised House Bill 6499 is a no-cost way to address the problem of educational failure of at-risk youth. Currently, schools are already required to file FWSNs after the failure of parental participation and community interventions. However, **schools often fail to do so** until students have accumulated many more absences than are required to define a student as "truant." Schools are **not held accountable** for this failure, which makes it more difficult to enforce the law. Because of the **delay in filing**, students may not even access services until far into the school year, as late as spring or even summer. Clinicians from programs that help truant students have testified to the fact that it is **far more difficult to engage students** so late into the year, especially when their programs are designed to work with and within the school systems.

The longer a child is truant, the harder it is to reengage him or her with the school community. Quickly addressing truancy means greater chance of diversion from the juvenile justice system. Therefore the Alliance supports H.B. 6499.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

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