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To: House Co-Chair Diana S. Urban
Senate Ranking Member Joseph Markley
House Ranking Member Terrie Wood
Honorable Members of the Children's Committee

From: Paul J. Knierim
Probate Court Administrator

Re: RB 982, An Act Establishing a Pilot Truancy Clinic in Waterbury

Date: February 22, 2011

The Office of the Probate Court Administrator supports adoption of this bill.

Since 2008, the Waterbury Regional Children's Probate Court and the Waterbury school system have jointly operated truancy clinics to help at-risk students and their families resolve the challenges that contribute to frequent school absences. Waterbury Probate Court Judge Thomas Brunnock conducts the clinics on-site at city schools.

The clinics are a team effort that connects families with the resources of the regional children's court, school staff, police, social services agencies and other community resources. Families can receive assistance from a Truancy Clinic Officer trained in social work and from student interns from Southern Connecticut State University's family therapy graduate program. The clinics attempt to look at each student's individual situation to identify and address the underlying causes of truancy.

Participation in a truancy clinic is voluntary. A student is referred to a clinic only if a school is not successful in efforts to reduce truancy, at which time the truant student's parents are sent a summons to appear at the clinic. At the first session, the judge advises parents that they are not obligated to participate and provides

information about the services available. Most families opt to take part in the clinic.

In 2010, truancy clinics operated at four elementary schools (grades K through 5). The families of approximately 125 students attend the clinics at any given time. Since the program began, the absenteeism rate of participating students has declined by 60 to 65 percent. In May, the Connecticut Association of Schools honored Judge Brunnock for his leadership in making the truancy clinics successful.

The program is operated within the available resources of the regional children's probate court. The Waterbury Department of Education is currently seeking a federal grant to extend truancy clinic services to all elementary schools and two middle schools in the city for three years. This proposed legislation would provide a detailed framework under which the expanded program would operate. It would also authorize probate magistrates, who are retired judges appointed by the Chief Justice, to conduct truancy clinics.

The truancy clinic is an innovative community-based program that is achieving measurable results. We urge the committee's approval.