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Select Committee On Children
Public Hearing
Tuesday, March 1, 2011
S.B. No.1044

Good Morning, I would like to thank Rep. Urban, Sen. Musto, Rep. Fawcett, and the members of the Select Committee on Children for this opportunity to express my thoughts regarding S.B. No.1044. My name is Christine Banks and I am an Advanced Standing Graduate Student at the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work, as well as an intern at the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut's Chapter. Today I am here to testify in support of S.B. No.1044; An Act Requiring the Department of Children and Families to Conduct Abuse or Neglect Investigations of Youths Arrested for Prostitution.

As a master's level social work student whose concentration of study is policy practice, I am very much interested in the formulation and implementation of policies meant to be beneficial to children and adolescents. They make up the segment of our citizenship that is most vulnerable to abuse and neglect as well as personal criminal exploitation. I strongly believe the raising of this bill is a blatant indication that this population is being victimized by one of the world's oldest illegal profession, prostitution. This type of exploitation is a tragedy and should not continue to be an experience that impacts the lives of our youth. As concerned and responsible adults, we all have a moral obligation to do everything within our powers to correct this wrong that is being committed against our children and adolescents.

Youth prostitution is a complex phenomenon. It involves the performance of both "coerced and voluntary" sexual favors in exchange for money or things of value. Most often these children and adolescents are victims of physical and sexual abuse that occurred within their homes from family members and other close acquaintances. In their attempt to escape the abuse and or neglect these youth believe their only alternative is to runaway. To flee from their families only to realize they do not have any where safe and secure to run to. Once on the streets, with no meaningful way of supporting themselves because they are underage, uneducated, unskilled and ultimately unemployable they turn to what they think is their only solution; prostitution as a mean of existence and survival. The level of youth involvement in prostitution spans across a wide spectrum. This behavior can be found in youth who are members of gangs, addicted to drugs as well as those who have been abandoned and thrown away by their families.

It is the complexity surrounding the phenomenon of youth prostitution that makes the intervention of the Department of Children and Families so necessary for this population. The services that will be made available through DCF are critical for these children and adolescents; it will provide them with the resources they will need to reclaim their young lives. DCF will be able to provide them with a sense of permanency and safety, individual case management, medical services and substance abuse treatment, counseling and therapeutic services as well as educational services. Also, in some instances DCF will be able to successfully facilitate the reunification of youth with their families.

While at my field placement, I was able to speak with a DCF worker regarding the bill. She was adamant in her response. She stated that these children and adolescents are under the

legal age of self-consent, and most assuredly must be referred to DCF so that appropriate assessments' and intervention plans can be implemented in an effort to get them back on the right track in life.

I urge the committee to vote in favor of S.B. No. 1044 in an effort to reduce and or eliminate the number of youths being arrested for prostitution here in the State of Connecticut. The investigations conducted by DCF can be the states measuring instrument that can shed some light on the reasons youths are choosing to participate in such an undesirable behavior. By saying yes to this bill you are boldly proclaiming to the youth of Connecticut that their lives are valued and the outcomes of their futures are essential to the well being and success of the state.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.