



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE  
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 17, 2012

**Opposing**

**H.B. No. 5014 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE  
EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 201  
(Department of Children and Families)**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee: This testimony is submitted by Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (Alliance). 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. I also serve as co-chair of the Keep the Promise Children's Committee, which works to ensure an effective children's mental health system in the state which prevents out-of-home behavioral health placements and juvenile justice system involvement.

**The Alliance and Keep the Promise Children's Committee are concerned about the deep cuts proposed to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), cuts that do not recognize the need to invest the funds saved by using community-based rather than out-of-state or congregate care facilities into the programs and services needed to ensure the success of youth and families in those community settings. We also want to ensure that the programs and services implemented to provide avoid long detention stays and allow for early intervention and diversion from the juvenile justice system are preserved.**

The DCF budget faces substantial cuts this year, especially to the Board and Care line items. The philosophy and plan of the Department, since Commissioner Katz and her team began last year, has been to reduce the use of out of state and congregate care facilities in order to keep more children in their communities. In order to do that successfully, more community programs and services need to be in place to support the youth and their families in those communities. The Commissioner often discussed her plan to take some of the funds saved by keeping kids out of expensive out of state or congregate placements and reinvest them into the front end of the system – to expand existing programs and create new community-based services. This budget does not reflect any type of reinvestment of funds into the front end of the system.

We completely agree with keeping children in their homes and communities whenever possible. We know that research shows community placements to be more effective than institutions. In practice you cannot simply close the doors to those institutions and congregate facilities without offering alternatives to ensure the needs of youth and families are met. The state's current continuum of community-based services is not complete or robust enough to ensure the best outcomes for youth. The stated plans and intentions of DCF are to address and fill the gaps in that continuum. It cannot fulfill these plans and intentions if it is prohibited from using the funds it has saved. The Department has fulfilled part one of the process – find the dollars to reinvest. The Legislature must allow it to fulfill part two – invest those dollars in programs and services that will allow children to be in their communities successfully.

At the Alliance we know that early identification, early intervention, diversion and prevention work. We have seen the numbers of youth entering the juvenile justice system and the numbers

of those youth who end up in the back end of the juvenile justice system drop dramatically over the past decade. Legislation and budgets this body passed, which emphasized community programs vs. detention and incarceration were key to that success. We are in danger now, of seeing that success fade as funding cuts lead to reductions in front end services. As the system readies for the 17-year-olds to join as this budget cycle begins, the continuum of services must be as strong as possible.

We ask that the budget for the Department of Children and Families include significant reinvestment of dollars into strengthening the continuum of community based services that will allow children and families to be successful in their communities and that specific attention be paid to the prevention and early intervention of the Department's mandate so that children at risk of, or in the juvenile justice system have access to programs and services we know work to keep them from escalating.

Thank you for your time and attention.