

TESTIMONY OF ERICA E. BROMLEY, MSW
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March 12, 2012

Regarding
HB 5432 AN ACT REGARDING SCHOOL BASED ARRESTS

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee: My name is Erica Bromley and I am the Director of the Manchester Youth Service Bureau, which is one of 100 YSBs serving 147 communities throughout CT. In addition, I am a board member of the CT Youth Services Association and co-chair of its Advocacy Committee.

As you probably know, despite a decrease in overall rates of juvenile arrest, the proportion of arrests occurring in our schools is rising. Research shows that this *growing trend of in-school arrests is not caused by worsening behavior by students, but rather by a change in the ways adults respond to behaviors*, largely due to policies that promote suspension, expulsion, and arrest that exclude students from the learning environment, too often for minor and non-criminal behaviors. These discipline practices are linked to negative socio-emotional and developmental outcomes, academic failure, and often dropout—particularly among our African American and Latino students and those with special education needs.

HB 5432 calls for districts with police in their schools to have a Memorandum of Agreement in place codifying the role of police officers and school administrators. OPM's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee developed a model MOA and in Manchester, we have found it to be very effective. Using that MOA as a guide, the Superintendent, Police Chief, Juvenile Court Judge and the Youth Service Bureau, got together with our newly formed Collaborative to look at graduated sanctions and how to use existing diversion programs as well as create additional diversionary intervention options.

This bill also proposes to strengthen the collection and reporting of data. In Manchester, the collaborative partners worked together to gather our data, which was critical to ensuring buy-in, to understanding how this issue effects our community and schools and to determine what types graduated sanctions and school staff training would be most effective. The proposal to require each district to collect and report this data will make the process much easier for others, and for us going forward.

After roughly seven months of planning, our new system went into place this past fall. When we examined the first set of data, comparing the first four months of the 2011 school year to the same period in 2010, school arrests were down in Manchester:

In September, by 81%

In October, by 86%

In November, by 86%

In December, by 95%.

Important to note is that suspensions at the High School also decreased by 54% during that same time period (Sept-Dec). Through the collective work of the Collaborative and new policy guidelines, School Resource Officers and school administration are now referring students more often to diversionary programs as well as to service providers based on individual needs of the students and families. This work is done with strong leadership both inside and outside of the classroom, the will to keep youth out of court and in school and a small influx of resources – mostly for staff training.

I truly believe that such a collaborative initiative can be replicated throughout the State with similar success and I encourage the Legislature to keep this model in mind as it works to not only reduce school based arrests, but also to improve school climate, student engagement and achievement. Our efforts in Manchester have worked to keep more kids in school and the development of a Memorandum of Agreement and the collection of school arrest data were critical aspects in those efforts.

Those at the table in Manchester, as well as the Board members of the CT Youth Services Association, applaud the efforts of this committee and support HB 5432.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.