



PEDRO E. SEGARRA
MAYOR

Testimony by Mayor Pedro E. Segarra
City of Hartford
Senate Bill 442

An Act Concerning the Prevention of Urban Youth Delinquency and Violence
March 23, 2012, 10:30AM in Hearing Room 2E

Co-Chairmen Coleman and Fox, Ranking Members Kissel and Hetherington, Vice-Chairmen Doyle and Holder-Winfield and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this important bill, which, if passed, would have a terrific and long-lasting impact on your Capital City and, more importantly, more than 32,250 youth in Hartford under the age of 18.

Since taking office more than 20 months ago, I have focused a significant amount of my time on enhancing and expanding services and extending new opportunities to Hartford's young people, including an additional \$500,000 appropriation last year for summer youth employment¹ and a reorganization of what was previously the Office of Youth Services, the Office of Young Children and the Recreation Division in the Department of Public Works into the Department of Families, Children, Youth & Recreation. This effort has streamlined services, increased accountability and encouraged greater dialogue between the appropriate city stakeholders and the public. This newly constructed department has three major programs, facilitated in collaboration with several community organizations, including The Village for Children and Families, COMPASS Youth Collaborative, the YMCA, AFCAMP and Hartford Community That Cares. These three initiatives include:

- **Peace Builders**: A community-based, violence *intervention* program focused on the most extreme form of violence – homicides. It utilizes what are sometimes referred to as case managers, talented and experienced individuals who have the credibility to work with gang members, victims and families, on the ground, in real time, 24/7. Financed from the general fund, it has been quite successful in reducing homicides in Hartford.
- **Youth Alive!** (Adult Leaders Impacting a Vision for Excellence): A program which uses structured and supported mentoring relationships to keep young people, ages 10-15, out of gangs and away from all forms of delinquency and violent behavior.
- **Diverging High Risk Youth**: Commonly referred to as Juvenile Review Boards, this is a partnership between law enforcement, schools and community organizations to reduce unnecessary school-based arrests (although these can occur elsewhere as well) and divert youth accused of low level offenses through a juvenile review board process using the BARJ (Balanced and Restorative Justice) approach for victims and the community. Interestingly, this model takes into account the impact of offenses on the community *as a system* beyond the impact on the offenders, victims and their families. This Initiative also includes the **Hartford Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Reduction Committee**, which addresses incidents in grades K-8 (and high school) and focuses on prevention mechanisms that will reduce the number of minority youth becoming part of the juvenile justice system.

Another effort that has garnered my time and attention is the redesign and expansion of the Hartford Police Department's Police Activities League. Upon taking office in June 2010 I immediately set out, with the help of then Chief Daryl Roberts, to bring greater attention and focus to this operation. The City of Hartford has the dubious distinction of having more incarcerated individuals from one City than any other municipality (2,601, or 2.1%), a median household income of \$28,970,² and a poverty rate of almost 33%, and I felt that a community engagement initiative by the Hartford Police

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Department was a critical component in helping to stem the tide and turn a very important corner. Since June 2010, PAL has been providing quality academic support and productive physical outlets to an average of 50 children per night, plus an additional 25 at a Frog Hollow boxing facility. With the help of the Hartford Courant, DATTCO, The Hartford and dozens of other partners, we have organized hockey nights with the Connecticut Whale, special skating sessions at the Bushnell Park rink and a trip to Ski Sundown.

It is also important to note that this bill coincides perfectly with an effort I launched late in 2010 called *Opportunities Hartford*. This model, built on successful initiatives in Providence, Rhode Island and Washington, D.C., sought out to identify the most promising programs and services in the fields of income, jobs and education. Coordinated by my Chief of Staff and Director of Families, Children, Youth & Recreation, and assisted by the Connecticut Association of Human Services, we have brought together more than 40 stakeholders for the last 6 months to develop a comprehensive strategy that will help the City better leverage opportunities that best maximize present services and programs that deliver the highest return on investment and the best outcomes.

I want to thank the sponsors of this terrific bill and for the committee's willingness to hear testimony on its merits. The City of Hartford enthusiastically requests favorable consideration and passage of this important bill.

¹This brought the City of Hartford's total commitment to summer youth employment to \$1.5 million, which provided almost 1500 Hartford youth the opportunity to learn valuable job skills.

²This, of course, falls well below the \$44,628 self-sufficiency standard for a family of two adults, one preschooler and one schoolage child.