

February 22, 2012

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Testimony on House Bill 5014, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2013

As Social worker and public policy advocate for the CT Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, I have been working closely with the Keep The Promise Coalition for Children's Mental Health. We have reviewed policies and reports on the Restraint and Seduction issue, the status of School-based Health Centers, and the need for recognition of children's mental health as part of the education reform. Children in foster care are especially vulnerable.

Our coalition has looked at the high number of restraints and seclusions used throughout the state. There is confusion over the reporting mechanisms, so the high numbers of 18,000 may be an underestimation. There is evidence that restraints and seclusion are not beneficial to children, and may, in fact, escalate the situations. I believe that there should be better training of school personnel in how to de-escalate behaviors to strictly limit the use of restraints and seduction.

Our coalition has also been aware that there have been many warning signs in children's educational records that a child has emotional issues interfering in the learning process. Often these issues are in the record for years before being addressed by the school in middle school or high school. The achievement gap can certainly be affected by emotional issues interfering with the learning process. Again, more training of school personnel needs to be done to alert them to the early signs of issues for children. If caught at an early age, the child abilities to learn will be greatly enhanced.

I am very concerned that there is a proposal to cut funding to the school based health centers in the state. Statistics have shown that these health centers have been able to provide services that students might not otherwise receive, and that improving a child's mental and physical health improves learning. We have been advocating for more school-based health centers as the need is great. The achievement gap cannot be closed without considering the emotional and physical needs of children.

Please consider the child's mental health when looking at the achievement gap issues.

Thank you for your time.

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