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OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE  
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**Testimony of Mickey Kramer, Acting Child Advocate  
The Office of the Child Advocate  
In Support of Raised House Bill No. 5432,  
An Act Concerning School-Based Arrests.  
March 12, 2012**

Good morning, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I sincerely apologize that no one from the Office of the Child Advocate is available this morning in person to offer this testimony to more effectively convey our strong support of **Raised House Bill No. 5432, An Act Concerning School-Based Arrests.**

Long-standing conventional wisdom has led many to believe that children and youth are most at risk of getting into trouble during the hours between their release from school and when their parents come home from work. However, according to CSSD data, approximately 40 percent of delinquency cases in Connecticut's juvenile courts are school related; that is, children as young as 10 years old are being arrested during the school day or while attending school-sponsored activities.<sup>1</sup> Approximately two-thirds of these arrests are for noncompliant or disruptive behaviors that result in minor charges such as breach of peace or disorderly conduct.<sup>2</sup>

While the offenses may be minor, the consequences of these arrests are dramatic. Youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system are rarely "scared straight." Rather, youth who are adjudicated delinquent and remanded in detention facilities are significantly less likely to graduate from high school and obtain steady employment as young adults. Our work over the past several years examining pathways and circumstances of youth in the adult criminal justice and correction systems consistently has highlighted significant disconnection from school; for too many, that disconnection began very early on.<sup>3</sup> Youth who maintain a connection to their schools and communities are more likely than their court-involved peers to avoid adverse experiences including illegal substance use, risky sexual behaviors, depression and suicide attempts.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that the

<sup>1</sup> [http://articles.courant.com/2012-01-03/news/hc-op-anderson-reduce-arrests-of-youths-0103-20120103\\_1\\_arrests-resource-officers-youth](http://articles.courant.com/2012-01-03/news/hc-op-anderson-reduce-arrests-of-youths-0103-20120103_1_arrests-resource-officers-youth)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ctjja.org/forum/toolkit/facts-schoolbasedarrests.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/From\\_Tauma\\_to\\_Tragedy\\_CT\\_-\\_Girls\\_in\\_Adult\\_Prison\\_7-08.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/From_Tauma_to_Tragedy_CT_-_Girls_in_Adult_Prison_7-08.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2009.

majority of student misconduct is best addressed within the school itself, by maintaining a positive school environment and implementing reasonable disciplinary policies that allow for consideration of a student's age and needs, rather than by frequent use of the juvenile justice system.

Raised House Bill No. 5432 aims to reduce the risk presented to youth by inappropriate arrests and delinquency proceedings by requiring school districts to create formal written agreements with School Resource Officers. These agreements would clearly define the Officers' role and responsibility within the context of a graduated response model of school discipline. These agreements will encourage schools to respond more consistently to non-emergency disruptive behaviors at school and specifically delineate strategies at the classroom, administration, and community service level to deal with behaviors that are not criminal in nature. Arrest of a student must always be the intervention of last resort, to be used only when a student's behavior rises to the level of true delinquency, and when direct school- and community-based interventions have been unsuccessful.

Raised House Bill No. 5432 also requires each local and regional Board of Education to submit to the Connecticut Department of Education Commissioner an annual report containing number of school-based arrests in the region, broken down by the arrested students' offense, gender, age, race, special education status, and whether English is the student's primary language. It is of vital importance for this statewide data to be available to the public in order to help Connecticut communities create interventions that will keep students in school and out of the juvenile justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill. The Office of the Child Advocate remains available to assist you in whatever way possible.