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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6504,
AN ACT CONCERNING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS¹**

We urge you to pass Raised Bill No. 6504, *An Act Concerning Alternative School Programs*. The bill's proposal to increase the transparency and accountability of Connecticut's alternatives to traditional schools would be broadened and strengthened, however, by amending the bill also to require Strategic School Profiles for the alternative schools operated by the CT Department of Children and Families (USD #2), as well as the schools in Connecticut congregate care facilities in which DCF places children and youth in its care and custody and the schools in detention facilities operated by the Court Support Services Division within the Judicial Branch (CSSD) or by a private provider through a contract with CSSD.

Connecticut students who are struggling academically or behaviorally, have a problem with truancy, or who have been suspended may leave traditional educational environments and be placed in an alternative school. Alternative schools and alternative school programs provide a crucial second chance for students who struggle in traditional schools. However, the absence of a uniform state statutory definition of alternative schools makes it difficult for parents, advocates and other interested parties to monitor the schools' effectiveness and prevents policymakers from applying uniform standards to these schools. In fact, it is currently impossible to find out how many alternative schools exist, how many students attend such schools, what programming and resources exist at each of these schools and whether students at these schools are making academic progress.

Raised Bill No. 6504 has two main provisions. First, it would propose to finally define the term "alternative school program" in state education law, allowing for greater oversight of these schools. Second, it would require these schools to submit a Strategic School Profile, aligning the reporting requirements of traditional and alternative schools. In doing so, the bill could help ensure equal educational opportunities for students who have already fallen behind academically as these small changes will yield a wealth of information about the educational achievement of students in alternative schools and the educational programs they are being offered. This

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information is needed so that we can evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts to provide a second chance to these vulnerable students.

Strategic School Profiles function like a report card for each school and school district, providing insight into student needs and performance as a function of school resources.

The Profiles facilitate monitoring of each school's inputs and outcomes. **While HB 6504 would require Profiles for alternative school programs operated by local or regional boards of education, it is under-inclusive in one important respect.** Schools in USD # 2 (the schools that the CT Department of Children and Families operates), schools at private congregate care facilities operated by providers with DCF contracts, and schools at detention facilities operated by the Court Support Services Division within the Judicial Branch (CSSD) or by a private provider through a contract with CSSD also serve academically vulnerable students and do not currently submit strategic school Profiles. Very little is known about the standards at these schools or the academic achievement of youth who attend them. The standardized test results that do exist for youth who were in USD # 2 at the time they took the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) reveal that these students are vulnerable. From 2007 to 2012, between 0.0% and 8.6% of students in USD # 2 reached the state's goal in the CAPT in math and science. In English and writing, the results were worse – 0 to 5% of USD # 2 students were at or above the goal. Average scaled scores in USD # 2 were 25-30% lower than in the state as a whole and 8-21% lower than in Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. In short, youth in USD # 2 are among the most educationally at risk of all of Connecticut's youth.

As the legislature begins to set more comprehensive standards for alternative schools and school programs, legislators should make sure they do not forget children at these other alternatives to traditional schools.

Monitoring these unique schools also requires unique data. Because schools in USD # 2, congregate care facilities, and juvenile detention facilities have very high turnover, additional data are required to track these schools. For example, the standardized test scores of a student who only attended a school for a month cannot be the ultimate measure of that school's quality. Therefore, data about length of stay at the school, rate of educational progress, and placement upon exit from the school are needed to paint a full picture.

A first step to bringing the educational needs of these most at-risk youth to light can be taken by amending section 3 of Raised Bill 6504 to require that Strategic School Profiles also be required of schools in USD #2, as well as of schools at private congregate care facilities operated by providers with DCF contracts, and schools at detention facilities operated by CSSD or by a private provider through a contract with CSSD. Section 3 should also be amended to require additional data in these schools' Profiles. Specifically, we urge the committee to amend section 3 of the bill to state:

Sec. 3. Subsection (c) of section 10-220 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2013*):

(c) Annually, each local and regional board of education and Unified School District # 2 shall submit to the Commissioner of Education a strategic school profile report for each school under its jurisdiction and for the school district as a whole. In addition, each school at a congregate care facility operated by the Department of Children and Families or by a private provider through a contract with the Department of Children and Families and each school at a detention facility operated by the Court Support Services Division within the Judicial Branch or by a private provider through a contract with the Court Support Services Division within the Judicial Branch shall submit to the Commissioner of Education a strategic school profile report for the program. The superintendent of each local and regional school district and Unified School District # 2 and the principal of each school at a congregate care or detention facility shall present the profile report at the next regularly scheduled public meeting of the board of education after each November first. The profile report shall provide information on measures of (1) student needs, (2) school resources, including technological resources and utilization of such resources and infrastructure, (3) student and school performance, including truancy, (4) the number of students enrolled in an adult high school credit diploma program, pursuant to section 10-69, operated by a local or regional board of education or a regional educational service center, (5) equitable allocation of resources among its schools, (6) reduction of racial, ethnic and economic isolation, [and] (7) special education, and (8) the program of instruction offered as part of an alternative school program, pursuant to section 1 of this act, and the number of students enrolled in such alternative school program. For purposes of this subsection, measures of special education include (A) special education identification rates by disability, (B) rates at which special education students are exempted from mastery testing pursuant to section 10-14q, (C) expenditures for special education, including such expenditures as a percentage of total expenditures, (D) achievement data for special education students, (E) rates at which students identified as requiring special education are no longer identified as requiring special education, (F) the availability of supplemental educational services for students lacking basic educational skills, (G) the amount of special education student instructional time with nondisabled peers, (H) the number of students placed out-of-district, and (I) the actions taken by the school district to improve special education programs, as indicated by analyses of the local data provided in subparagraphs (A) to (H), inclusive, of this subdivision. USD # 2 and schools at congregate care or juvenile detention facilities shall also provide information on measures of A) student mobility including the median and maximum length of stay at the school, B) the rate of students' educational progress while at the school, and C) students' educational placements upon leaving the school. The superintendent shall include in the narrative portion of the report information about parental involvement and if the district has taken measures to improve parental involvement, including, but not limited to, employment of methods to engage parents in the planning and

improvement of school programs and methods to increase support to parents working at home with their children on learning activities. For purposes of this subsection, measures of truancy include the type of data that is required to be collected by the Department of Education regarding attendance and unexcused absences in order for the department to comply with federal reporting requirements and the actions taken by the local or regional board of education to reduce truancy in the school district. Such truancy data shall be considered a public record for purposes of chapter 14.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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