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## TESTIMONY OF CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES, INC., GREATER HARTFORD LEGAL AID, AND NEW HAVEN LEGAL ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 6682, AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the legal services programs of Connecticut – Connecticut Legal Services, Inc., Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and New Haven Legal Assistance Association. The legal services programs strongly urge the committee to support H.B. 6682, An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel. Legal services attorneys have been representing low-income families and students across the state on educational issues for over 30 years.

The legal services programs come together to support this proposed legislation because there is a crucial need in Connecticut for (1) improved communication and collaboration between school districts and the police stationed within them; (2) written memorandums of agreement (MOAs) between school districts and police departments so that everyone understands the police officers' role and responsibilities; and (3) improved data on arrests of students in school.

Studies have long shown that increased police presence in schools leads to increased student arrest, often for non-violent incidents, which result in low-level charges such as breach of peace and disorderly conduct.<sup>i</sup> Increased police presence has contributed to what has become known nationally as the "school-to-prison pipeline," or an increase in children being pushed into the criminal justice system by schools.<sup>ii</sup> This criminalization of non-violent behavior does not promote safe schools and only harms our most vulnerable students by weakening their connection to their schools and making it more likely that they will drop out.<sup>iii</sup> Further, arrests of students in schools disproportionately impacts students of color and students with disabilities.<sup>iv</sup>

**This is a crucial time for Connecticut to implement these protections because schools are increasing police presence.** In the aftermath of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, many towns are increasing the police presence in their schools in an effort to keep children safer. This bill can help prevent the harmful and unintended consequences of increased student arrests that would undoubtedly stem from having more police officers in the schools.



The legal services attorneys who practice education law have experience working with school districts across the state. We have witnessed the tremendous variation in roles of police officers in the schools – across towns and even within the same towns and same schools. Some school resource officers have shared with us that they’ve been told by school administrators to arrest students for loud or disrespectful behavior that never would have led to a call to the police . . . but nevertheless ends in arrest because the police officer happens to be there. Others have shared with us that it’s their role to arrest students for “disorderly” behavior. It’s clear that without an agreement on roles and responsibilities that includes a graduated sanctions model of intervention, it is impossible to have consistency in interventions within a town or even within a school. This lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities leads to arbitrary and inconsistent arrests of students, when other alternative interventions would be much more effective and appropriate.

In order to promote better communication between police and schools and to reduce ineffective and unnecessary student arrests, we strongly urge the Judiciary Committee to support H.B. 6682, An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted By:  
Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.  
Greater Hartford Legal Aid  
New Haven Legal Assistance Association

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<sup>i</sup> Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. “Adult Decisions: Connecticut Rethinks Student Arrests,” January, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> ACLU, “Hard Lessons: School Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns,” November, 2008, p. 5.

<sup>iii</sup> The Advancement Project, “Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline,” (July, 2002), p. 8-10.

<sup>iv</sup> Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. “Adult Decisions: Connecticut Rethinks Student Arrests,” January, 2013, p. 4.