



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE CHILDREN COMMITTEE
MARCH 5, 2013
COMMENT ON RAISED S.B. No. 972
AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Children Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Abby Anderson; I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit organization working to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocating a safe, effective and fair system for those involved.

Proposed S.B. 972 calls for a study of the effectiveness and reach of the current children's mental health system. As we have testified in the past, many children with mental health issues, whose primary issues are mental health related, end up in the juvenile justice system. Their issues may have gone unrecognized or, more often, untreated, leading to eventual referral to court. This is not an efficient or effective way to handle children's behavioral health issues or to help children have the highest chance for recovery and successful transition to adulthood. The juvenile justice system is also the most expensive way and place to treat children and youth's mental health needs.

Although the state and its agencies have begun to move to an "unsiloed" system, that ideal does not yet exist. If the system is going to be evaluated, as this bill suggests, that evaluation must look at the needs of children and youth and the capacity of the state private and public providers to meet those needs regardless of the port of entry and/or label of the child. I am attaching a one-page document developed by a wide variety of stakeholders engaged in children's mental health that outlines the broad goals and policy beliefs we share. The first element on that page is: **Ensure access to quality community mental health services for all of Connecticut's children.** *Every child in every neighborhood deserves access to mental health services irrespective of insurance status, setting, or system involvement (child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, school).*

Right now, the children's mental health system is disjointed, complicated, and confusing for practitioners and families. For example, involvement in the juvenile justice system is an exclusionary factor for a child to receive voluntary services through DCF. As you know, the voluntary services system is DCF's primary behavioral health delivery system to children in the state.

The Alliance is in favor of an effort to evaluate the scope and effectiveness of the children's mental health system. That evaluation must look at the entirety of the system and include every child, regardless of his or her setting, insurance status or "label." Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI Children's Community Programs, Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children

Strengthening the Mental Health Systems of Care for Children and Adolescents in Connecticut

March 4, 2013

Organizations

Child Health and Development Institute

Child FIRST

Connecticut Association of School Psychologists

Connecticut Association of School Social Workers

Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness

Connecticut Commission on Children

Connecticut Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance

Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate

Connecticut Office of the Healthcare Advocate

Keep the Promise Coalition

National Association of Social Workers Connecticut

Connecticut's leading stakeholders representing the rights and interests of children and adolescents have agreed on a set of guiding principles and recommendations to strengthen the mental health systems of care across the home, school, and community settings:

- I. **Ensure access to quality community mental health services for all of Connecticut's children.** Every child in every neighborhood deserves access to mental health services irrespective of insurance status, setting, or system involvement (child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, school).
- II. **Promote early identification and intervention of mental health problems in young children.** Every child in every neighborhood has access to an early childhood specialist and to a pediatric healthcare clinician trained to identify and triage mental health problems in infants and toddlers.
- III. **Expand and improve access to school-based and school-linked mental health services.** Every child in every neighborhood attends a school staffed by a full-time school social worker and school psychologist, each of whom has a manageable case load.
- IV. **Ensure that quality mental health services are adequately reimbursed and funded.** Health plans must be held accountable for any and all violations of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008.