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February 13, 2014

The Honorable Beth Bye  
The Honorable Toni Walker  
Chairwomen  
Joint Committee on Appropriations  
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

**Re: Testimony of Jill Ruane, Esq. to Appropriations Committee in Opposition to Girls' Facility Proposed by DCF**

Dear Chairwomen and Committee Members:

I am an attorney who concentrates her practice on the representation of young men and women in the juvenile courts of this state. As an advocate for my clients, I see every day the impact of the juvenile justice system on the futures of our most delicately positioned young people. Surely, some have made poor choices and committed criminal offenses and need the guidance of the juvenile justice system to correct their behavior and learn to avoid such conduct in the future. Today, however, I am writing to voice my opposition to appropriations that would serve to fund the construction of a juvenile detention facility for young women.

**First:** Over the last several years, Connecticut set a goal to incarcerate fewer youth. Recently, Connecticut succeeded in cutting its incarcerated youth by almost half. One has to question the usefulness of a facility of this type when current programs are eliminating the need for such a large facility.

**Second:** Routinely, female youth entering the juvenile justice system are often victims of mental, physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, oftentimes at the hands of those who previously used their position of dominance to exert control and harm them. A locked facility will further victimize and traumatize these girls by creating a similar mental state of submission.

**Third:** Once a facility of this stature is built, it will inevitably be filled, creating a slippery slope of detention for young women who are "on the line" between locked detention and other less restrictive means. If the bed is available, in my experience in the criminal justice system, it becomes far easier to place the juvenile in the facility than to investigate other options. Detention becomes the easy way out for administration. The facility will cost \$2.6 million to build. This money can be better spent educating girls, providing transitional services to prepare and equip these girls to be contributing

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members of society. The current lineup of programs always seem to have long waiting lists, and financial support of these programs, already in place, could expand to treat more juvenile offenders within the framework of the existing system. The young women in the care of the juvenile courts are generally lacking in positive role models and have developed a distrust of authority because of it. By placing young women in a locked detention facility, we serve to create situations of oppositional defiance, rather than growth and maturity and only serve to ingrain in these women a compliance with incarceration, creating a permanent class of young women who are trained for a life in our adult jail.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to decline to appropriate this funding.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill M. Ruane