

**Testimony from Dr. Angela Irvine
National Council on Crime and Delinquency
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Thank you Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) budget.

My name is Angela Irvine. I am director of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency's Center on Young Girls and Women. I hold a PhD in sociology from Northwestern University, where I was a National Science Fellow. I have more than 20 years' experience in education and social policy and am currently principal investigator for two national studies: one of LGBT youth in the juvenile justice system and the other on how states across the country have dramatically reduced youth incarceration over the past 10 years.

I would like to address the \$2.6 million appropriation for a second maximum-security facility for girls in the juvenile justice system. Research shows that secure confinement is particularly inappropriate for traumatized girls, is imposed disproportionately on girls of color and girls who are gender non-conforming, and does not improve public safety.

The majority of incarcerated boys and girls have experienced trauma, and girls tend to experience higher rates of sexual and physical abuse.¹ When the system locks up these girls, they are re-traumatized. DCF has said that the facility will serve many girls who have been trafficked. This approach contradicts the emerging research on best practices for serving this

¹ Sherman, F. T., Mendel, R. A., & Irvine, A. (2013). *JDAI Practice Guide: Making detention reform work for girls*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

population.² The procedures used in a maximum-security facility, such as searches, are particularly damaging to sexual assault survivors; further, corrections line staff who work with girls typically lack the specialized training needed to provide trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and culturally competent services. Because the environment of a maximum-security facility impedes healing, best practices dictate that trauma survivors be held in less-restrictive settings, unless there is a clear need to protect public safety. No one is arguing that such a need exists in the cases of girls who would be sent to this facility.

It is also important to note that youth of color have a greater chance of being sentenced to secure facilities than their White peers.³ This is the case even in states where youth incarceration is declining. Qualitative evidence shows that girls of color receive harsher treatment than their White peers. Monique Morris, a Soros Justice Fellow and researcher in the areas of juvenile justice and civil rights, argues that African American girls are generally seen as more masculine and therefore are easier to punish. This is particularly true for gender non-conforming girls of color, who often are charged with more serious offenses than their gender-conforming and White peers.

Without developing a service infrastructure that intentionally addresses the intersections of sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression, and racial and ethnic disparities, girls of color will be disproportionately confined in this new facility. As Connecticut makes many efforts to reduce disproportionate minority contact, it will simultaneously increase unequal treatment within its juvenile justice system with the opening of this facility.

Finally, it is particularly disturbing that DCF is proposing to nearly double its capacity to lock up girls at a time when the number of girls committed as delinquent is dropping. A

² Walker, K. (2013). *Ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children: A call for multi-system collaboration in California*. Sacramento, CA: California Child Welfare Council.

³ Based on quantitative analysis of individual-level data from five counties: Summit, OH; Alameda, CA; Jefferson, AL; Dallas, TX; and Peoria, IL.

forthcoming report by NCCD shows that incarceration is decreasing in most states due to investments in community-based alternatives. These alternatives have not resulted in an increase in crime. I would also refer you to the Justice Policy Institute's recent report showing that Connecticut achieved savings in its juvenile justice system by funding community-based programming in preference to incarceration, while youth crime decreased.⁴

The state should invest in gender-responsive, trauma-informed placement options that are close to home and intentionally connect girls to their families and communities. Indeed, if Connecticut created better reentry programs, stays at the existing locked girls' facility, Journey House, would be far shorter. This would free beds for those few girls who need secure placement. Though stays of three to six months are seen as best practices, girls are staying at Journey House much longer. Two questions I would urge you to ask are:

1. Why are stays at Journey House so long?
2. What would DCF do to ensure that girls do not stay for equally long periods at the new facility?

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony about the proposed maximum-security facility for girls. I would be happy to answer questions legislators might have about this issue and can be reached at airvine@nccdglobal.org or 510-874-5520.

⁴ Mendel, R. (2013). *Juvenile justice reform in Connecticut: How collaboration and commitment have improved public safety and outcomes for youth*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute.