



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 17, 2014
SUPPORTING RAISED H.B. No. 5567
AN ACT CONCERNING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education 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 advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We support evidence-based prevention to keep children from entering the system as well as services to help kids who do enter the system to be successful. The Alliance is in favor of H.B. 5567, An Act Concerning Alternative Schools.

A large number of juvenile justice involved youth end up in alternative schools. Currently, these alternative schools do not have to fulfill the same requirements around data-collection and educational standards as other schools. In order to make academic progress, and avoid school failure and/or dropping out, alternative school students need and deserve educational environments that meet the same quality and accountability measures as those their peers attend. H.B 5567 takes steps to ensure all alternative schools provide their students with the opportunities and tools they need to be successful.

Students are referred to alternative schools because public schools cannot meet their academic and/or behavioral needs. Many of these students have already shown themselves to require more specialized attention and are often grade levels behind, yet alternative schools are not required to report test scores, attendance, or meet any standards for student achievement. Therefore, we have no way to know if our most vulnerable students are showing up for school, what kind of curriculum they are following or if they are, in fact, learning anything.

While some alternative schools help students succeed, others have become a "dumping ground" for vulnerable students, including those trying to reenter from the juvenile justice system. These lesser alternative school settings lead youth further down the path of school dropout and juvenile and criminal justice system involvement. We all know about the economic consequences of school dropouts for both individuals and communities. This legislation offers a few ways to begin addressing this aspect of the achievement gap at no cost to the taxpayers. We can and should enact the items in the proposed legislation, including developing methods of data-collection, establishing standardized processes for enrollment of students, and mandating class hours and course offerings. Our students deserve no less.

Thank you for your time.

Alliance member organizations: AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children,

Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut, 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