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**TESTIMONY OF CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES, INC.
AND NEW HAVEN LEGAL ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION
FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 3, 2014**

**IN SUPPORT OF RAISED H.B. 5355
AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN
BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL**

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS) and New Haven Legal Assistance Association (NHLAA). Legal services attorneys have been representing low-income families and students across the state on educational issues for over 30 years.

CLS and NHLAA fully support HB 5355, an Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel, 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 (MOA's) 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.

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 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 town and same schools. Some school resource officers (SROs) have shared with us that they've been told by school administrators to arrest students for loud or disrespectful behavior that otherwise would not have led to a call to the police, but ends in arrest only because the police officer happens to be there. Others have shared with us that they feel their role is to arrest students for "disorderly" behavior.

In July 2013, in response to Waterbury's ranking as the 4th highest city in the state for school based arrests, Connecticut Legal Services formed a local



collaborative with leaders from the school district, the police department, the judicial branch, CSSD, DCF, the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, and Waterbury Youth Services to reduce the arrest numbers. To date, the collaborative has been successful in bringing together the school district and the police department to sign a memorandum of agreement (MOA) which clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of SROs in Waterbury schools. The MOA, developed using OPM's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee's model MOA, also includes a graduated response model detailing the limited behaviors that warrant SRO involvement. In addition, Waterbury SROs have been trained on effective interactions with youth. Furthermore, Waterbury is in the process of implementing restorative justice programs at its middle schools. The success of the work done by the collaborative is undeniable: Waterbury's overall school arrest rate is down 21% from this time last year.

Waterbury's accomplishments to date demonstrate the tremendous need for MOAs between schools and police. 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.

Our work has also demonstrated the need for improved data collection regarding school based arrests. At present, data collection from multiple sources, including the schools, CSSD, police departments, and the State Department of Education, is necessary to obtain an accurate picture of school based arrests in our communities. This data collection is hampered by the lack of a consistent definition of school based arrest and the inconsistent reporting of demographic information. We spend significant time gathering and analyzing data from all these sources in order to determine the total number of school based arrests in our communities, the offenses for which students were arrested, and the demographic information of the affected students. Demographic data is particularly important, given that students of color and students with disabilities have disproportionate contact with the juvenile justice system.

In order to promote better communication between police and schools, improve data collection, and to reduce ineffective and unnecessary student arrests, we strongly urge the Education Committee to support H.B. 5355, An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Submitted by:

Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.

New Haven Legal Assistance Association