

Testimony Supporting

H.B. 5040: An Act Concerning the Department of Children and Families and the Protection of Children

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Committee on Children

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children:

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports information sharing between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Court Support Services Division in order to allow DCF to track recidivism among juvenile offenders, as proposed in Section 1(g)(25) of H.B. 5040.

Currently, DCF does not track recidivism of its juvenile offenders. Preventing recidivism is the goal of most programs for delinquent youth, and "...is the most commonly used indicator of [juvenile justice] program and system effectiveness."¹ In fact, "...a program's recidivism rate is generally regarded as the most critical indicator of program success."² Without measuring recidivism, DCF is unable to evaluate whether its programs and services are working.

Tracking recidivism is essential to improving Connecticut's juvenile justice system and ensuring that the system most effectively serves the children in its care. Recidivism data can be used to better serve youth by: informing the design of more effective programs and services, establishing the validity of risk and needs assessment tools that match youth to appropriate services, and pinpointing specific areas where racial bias might be affecting decision making.³ It can also be used to better evaluate the Department of Children and Families by: demonstrating accountability for use of public dollars, providing outcome measures to inform decision makers, and evaluating programs over time, which allows stakeholders to compare the relative benefits of particular programs over others.⁴ It is near impossible to discuss system effectiveness without recidivism data as a starting point.⁵

A 2013 Center for Juvenile Justice Reform study found that "the lack of access to data is a significant limitation in Connecticut's DCF-JSD [Juvenile Services Division]."⁶ **Measuring recidivism is a critical step in building DCF's juvenile justice system data capacity, thereby improving DCF's ability to serve Connecticut's children fairly and effectively.**⁷

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions now or at your convenience.

¹ See Phillip W. Harris *et al*, "Measuring Recidivism in Juvenile Corrections," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Journal of Juvenile Justice, available at: <http://www.journalofjuvjustice.org/joj0101/article01.htm>.

² See Phillip W. Harris *et al*, "A CJCA White Paper: Defining and Measuring Recidivism," Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, (2009), available at: http://ojj.la.gov/ojj/files/CJCA_Recidivism_WhitePaper.pdf.

³ *Ibid.* Also see Marion R. Kelly, MSW, James C. Howell, Ph.D., and Kristen Johnson, Ph.D, "Preliminary Report for the State of Connecticut," CT Department of Children and Families, (June 2013). A copy of this text is available upon request.

⁴ See Phillip W. Harris *et al*, "A CJCA White Paper: Defining and Measuring Recidivism," Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, (2009), available at: http://ojj.la.gov/ojj/files/CJCA_Recidivism_WhitePaper.pdf. For a more comprehensive framework for a data-driven juvenile justice system, see "A Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders," (Wilson & Howell, 1993; Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, et al., 2010).

⁵ See Marion R. Kelly, MSW, James C. Howell, Ph.D., and Kristen Johnson, Ph.D, "Preliminary Report for the State of Connecticut," CT Department of Children and Families, (June 2013). A copy of this text is available upon request. For a report that shows how recidivism data is used to evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of juvenile justice programs, see "Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice," Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, (December 2010), available at: <http://cjr.georgetown.edu/resources2/cjrppublications/ebppaper.html>.

⁶ See Marion R. Kelly, MSW, James C. Howell, Ph.D., and Kristen Johnson, Ph.D, "Preliminary Report for the State of Connecticut," CT Department of Children and Families, (June 2013). A copy of this text is available upon request.

⁷ *Ibid.*