



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
MARCH 11, 2014
FOR THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
OPPOSED TO RAISED S.B. NO. 429
AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC SAFETY**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Public Safety Committee: 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 vehemently opposes S.B. 429 An Act Concerning Public Safety. This bill would establish a "knockout game" assault as a class D felony and would transfer children of at least sixteen years of age charged with such assault to the regular criminal docket of the Superior Court.

This bill is problematic for two main reasons. First, it solves a problem that doesn't exist – there is already a way to hold those accused of assault accountable under the law. Second, it would make this D felony an automatic transfer offense for youth 16 of age and older, undermining the recent Raise the Age efforts and significantly lowering the kind of crime for which youth are automatically transferred. (Now, only those youth charged with A and B felonies are automatically transferred to the adult system). Additionally, we know that there are racial and ethnic disparities in our justice system – adult and juvenile. A change to the law, like the one proposed, could unintentionally exacerbate this issue.

First, there is no information to suggest the "knockout game" phenomenon actually exists. As the New York Times reported in December, "... police officials in several cities where such attacks have been reported said that the "game" amounted to little more than an urban myth, and that the attacks in question might be nothing more than the sort of random assaults that have always occurred."¹ Certainly an assault is a crime and those who commit assaults should be held accountable. Our current legal system is set up to do just this. There is no need to create a new class of offense for something scholars are not sure exists.

Second, to determine that a class D felony should result in automatic transfer to the adult system for those 16 and older would be against best practices and against the policy direction Connecticut has taken in recent years. In 2010, 16-year-olds were included in the juvenile justice system and in 2012 17-year-olds joined them. Those youth 14 or older who are charged with the most serious offenses, Class A and B felonies, are

¹ Buckley, C. (November 22, 2013) New York Times. *Knockout Game a Spreading Menace or a Myth?* Accessed March 10, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/23/nyregion/knockout-game-a-spreading-menace-or-a-myth.html?_r=0

automatically transferred to the adult court. Those charged with lower felonies can now be transferred to the adult court at the discretion of a juvenile court judge.

To summarize, this is a bill solving a problem that doesn't exist. Those who commit an assault can already be charged with that crime and, if a juvenile commits a serious assault, there is a process in place to transfer that youth to the adult system if appropriate.

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