

Testimony for March 3, 5pm for the Appropriations Secondary Education Sub-Committee

March 2, 2015

To: Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Secondary Education Sub-Committee:

My name is Karen Ravenelle-Bloom and I am writing in regards to proposed budget changes for the Connecticut Youth Services Association. I have worked as the Prevention Specialist for the Windham Youth Services Bureau for the past 25 years and prior to that as the Youth Services Coordinator at Coventry Youth Services for nearly two years. The majority of my work has been in providing direct services to youth and families, collaboration with schools, Universities, local businesses and all facets of the community. I have also been involved over the years with other Youth Service Bureaus throughout the state in the form of trainings, collaborations, and mutual support. There are 102 Youth Service Bureaus in CT and they serve over 145 Connecticut communities. With funding through the State Department of Education, CT YSB's has been able to make great strides in supporting over 448,000 youth and parents in the past two years alone. YSB's have worked very hard over the years to establish an efficient data system to document its' services and outcomes. We feel that the partnership with the SDE is crucial to the continuation of the delivery and fidelity of our programs as well as maintaining level funding.

As someone who has worked directly with the youth and families over 27 years, I have seen firsthand how the prevention and intervention programming that we provide have made concrete differences in families lives. I am presently working with children of children that I have serviced in the past. I have seen the difference that having consistent programming with positive role models makes in the lives of these young people. Students have gained valuable life skills, continued their education to finish high school and many have gone on to college as the first time family member to do so. At the present time, the work that I do in the area of prevention and life skills takes me into all five elementary schools and at the middle school in the town of Willimantic/Windham. Schools, summer camps, health educators, school social workers, and parents have all requested our services in providing quality in-school and after-school programs to their children. These programs and the relationships we build make a concrete difference.

I would like to note, that while our agency receives funding from the SDE, we also receive financial support from The Dept. of Children and Families, The Dept. of Social Services, the Town of Windham and a host of other small grants which support our educational, Juvenile Review Board, family, and outreach services. Many of these grants are dependent upon what we receive from the CT State Department of Education. While a shift to be funded through and report to the Dept of Children and Families may seem like the best move to make by the state, we feel the State Department of Education is the most efficient and practical source of overseeing the Connecticut Youth Services Association to ensure the best continuum of services possible for our clients. We hope that you will consider the importance of services to youth and families in our communities as we continue to work at the prevention and intervention of critical issues such as substance abuse prevention, school attendance, juvenile issues, building strong young people through positive youth development programs and providing a foundation that will create healthy and productive people to keep our communities strong.

Thank you,

Karen Ravenelle-Bloom, M.Ed., CPS
Prevention Coordinator
Windham Youth Services Bureau
872 Main St.
Willimantic, CT 06226
860-423-4534
860-377-0933 (C)

