



TESTIMONY – HB 6824

Appropriations Secondary Education Sub-Committee

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Secondary Education sub-committee:

My name is Erica Bromley and I am the Juvenile Justice Liaison for the CT Youth Services Association. The Association leads, strengthens and supports a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicated to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families. CYSA is a professional organization that advocates for and works with members in order to continue to best serve youth and families across the state. CYSA has been an integral part of the Connecticut YSB system since its founding in 1972.

I am here today to speak with you regarding proposed budget cuts to YSBs in HB 6824. The proposed cuts of \$1.3 million, which accounts for 42% of the total funding received from SDE currently, would be devastating to Youth Service Bureaus across CT. The current SDE budget for YSBs is approximately \$3.1 million and is spread across 102 YSBs who serve 145 communities. Funding has always been minimal, yet YSBs have managed to successfully serve thousands of youth and families. The proposed cuts would force many YSBs to make decisions not only about what programs and services to discontinue, but, in some cases, whether or not they can even keep their doors open. Additionally, CYSA opposes the proposed move from SDE to DCF, as it would negatively impact the multiple years of work done with data collection through Results Based Accountability that is directly aligned with SDE data. It would also effect any future work using this same system.

Of particular concern for me in my role as the Juvenile Justice Liaison, is the potential impact on the Juvenile Review Board system. Currently there are approximately 74 JRBs serving roughly 104 towns. All but 5 of these are administered, run by, and staffed by Youth Service Bureaus. Funds for JRBs have been non-existent until recently when a small amount of dollars for a portion of JRB functions was made available. And by no means do these new funds cover the entire cost of running a JRB. Less than half of the JRBs statewide are currently receiving limited funds for their JRB, but the remainder of the JRBs have no external state funding. YSBs are responsible for absorbing the entire costs of the JRBs or at minimum, a portion of the costs.

These proposed cuts would make an already difficult system of balancing the time and resources it takes to run a JRB even more challenging. Much work has been done over the last few years in CT to strengthen the Juvenile Justice system with much success. Part of the ongoing success continues to be the availability of diversionary programs and services, most notably, the JRBs. JRBs keep youth out of court. It's as simple as that.

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The JRB system has been the focus of much statewide work and attention, including the work of the statutorily mandated Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (the JJPOC). Some of you here today have been a part of this amazing process where experts in the field sit alongside Legislators working collaboratively to strengthen and study the JJ system. I also sit on that Committee and have been pleased with its forward progress. The proposed cuts being discussed would have implications on the work being done through this Committee regarding diversion programs.

I urge you to take a close look at what the consequences would be, both short term and long term, from making such an unprecedented cut in funding to a strong and successful Youth Service Bureau System. In closing, I also want to mention the long term costs that these proposed cuts would inevitably cause, especially as it relates to juvenile justice and diversion. JRBs are an inexpensive way to keep youth out of the JJ system and put them on the path to success. That is cost savings at its most basic level.

I thank you for your time and attention and am happy to take any questions.

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