



TESTIMONY of DONALD ROSENBLITT, M.D.,
In Support Of
H.B. 7050 An Act Concerning The Juvenile Justice System

Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly
Joint Committee on Judiciary

March 30, 2015

State Capitol, Hartford, Connecticut

My name is Donald Rosenblitt. I am writing in support of Section 4 of H.B. 7050. I am a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. I am the founder and the executive and clinical director of the Lucy Daniels Center in Cary, NC, a regional provider of education and mental health care for children. I have served the American Psychoanalytic Association as executive counselor and chair of the Board of Professional Standards.

North Carolina law allows for shackling only when reasonably necessary. Courtrooms in North Carolina are just as safe now as they were prior to this policy being enacted. I would encourage Connecticut to take similar action. Shackling is not necessary to maintain acceptable courtroom behavior. Indeed, it may engender more problem behavior. It humiliates young people and can reactivate past traumas. All of this occurs at a sensitive period in their development and may do permanent harm.

Connecticut has made significant advancements in juvenile justice reform through the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative. The Initiative

discourages the use of mechanical restraints in juvenile facilities in part because they “may evoke feelings of guilt, humiliation, embarrassment, hopelessness, powerlessness, fear and panic.” Humiliation would be amplified in the courtroom because of its public nature.

Most court-involved youth have suffered from abuse and neglect. Often, a significant component of the reasons adolescents turn to crime is that they are attempting to deal with shame, weakness and helplessness by putting themselves above rules and controls. For these youth in particular, shackling is not only inherently shame producing, but it may well hinder recovery by actually reinforcing the underlying psychological problems that can lead to problematic behaviors, including further criminal activity. Traumatic memories and experiences can be evoked by trigger experiences that can be literally measured in seconds.

Adolescence is a time of significant brain plasticity. Development is highly sensitive to environment, particularly to negative experiences. In other words, harm done to an adolescent can have a permanent effect. In adolescence, young people develop their sense of identity. Shackling sends negative messages: *You are dangerous. You are a criminal. You are less than human.* The negative messages relayed to the youth by the act of shackling may shape the way he or she self-identifies.

A child might well ask: *What is so horrible about me that I have to be in chains?* The child may come to one of two conclusions: Either he is a person incapable of self-control, or he is being treated unfairly. Neither of these conclusions encourages rehabilitation.

Adolescence is a time of opportunity, as well as vulnerability. Adolescents respond extremely positively when they feel respected and heard. Research shows that young people who say that they’ve experienced procedural fairness are more likely to cooperate with the court. Being shackled can hinder relationships with judges, defense attorneys, or others whose

collaboration is key to a successful outcome.

When young people are physically restrained, they lose control over their behavior at the most basic level. Self-regulation is not only a central goal of the juvenile court; it is foundational to many behaviors and milestones: academic success; healthy relationships; career development; and, of course, law-abiding behavior. Taking away the opportunity to self-regulate at a critical moment in a youth's life makes all of these positive outcomes less likely.

For these reasons, and because Section 4 of H.B. 7050 establishes a much-needed presumption against shackling, I urge you to pass it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Donald Rosenblitt", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Donald Rosenblitt, M.D.
Clinical/Executive Director,
Lucy Daniels Center