



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony

Judiciary Committee

April 1, 2015



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## GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 951 AN ACT CONSOLIDATING CRIMINAL JUSTICE, JUVENILE AND FAMILY SERVICE PROGRAMS

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) **supports** Bill No. 951, An Act Consolidating Criminal Justice, Juvenile and Family Service Programs.

The bill implements provisions of the Governor's proposed budget related to the consolidation of various criminal justice, juvenile justice and family services programs. For DCF, the most significant change is the transfer of responsibility for juvenile justice and family services functions currently overseen by Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD). CSSD provides a broad array of services that overlaps with DCF's programming. In fact, the two agencies serve the same population at different phases of their treatment, and have a history of sharing contracts and provider networks. DCF and CSSD plan jointly for a cohesive, integrated juvenile justice system. As examples, we are in the midst of developing a shared risk assessment instrument and are working together to enhance information sharing.

DCF believes that consolidating these programs would facilitate a number of service improvements and efficiencies, including:

- enhanced federal revenue generation related to CSSD contracted services;
- improved access to DCF's behavioral health services array for the probation and detention population;
- creating a continuity of care which allows for one case manager to provide community supervision throughout a child's juvenile justice involvement;
- improved outcomes for "crossover youth" - those children that are involved in the child welfare system who become involved with the juvenile justice court system. Nationwide estimates indicate that 40% of child are considered "crossover" youth;
- maximizing purchasing efficiencies by consolidating funding for contracted services;
- enhanced efficiencies by consolidating oversight over the operation of state run facilities; and,
- streamlining administration functions.

Up to 40% of children involved with child welfare systems nationwide will also have juvenile delinquency court involvement. This is not surprising considering the trauma many of these children have experienced. Juvenile justice involvement heightens the potential for these children to be re-traumatized, along with being in danger of having their actions misunderstood, bringing about harsher consequences. Many children in child welfare do not have the family support that allows them to navigate the system to achieve positive results. The merger of these

two agencies' juvenile functions and a coordinated approach in treating this population has the potential to halt further involvement, improving outcomes for crossover youth.

DCF and CSSD share many community service contracts, with DCF taking the contracting lead. The most costly contracts in the CSSD service array appear to be for private detention beds and substance abuse treatment beds. DCF has experience with these service types both from an administrative perspective and in our role as a licensing agency. DCF now independently finances and manages many contracts that serve the CSSD population in areas of primary and secondary prevention. Joining DCF and CSSD services into one network of care will improve access and create a comprehensive continuity of care. It will also allow for the contract dollars that are now split between the two agencies to be merged and a plan to be developed for a full continuum of care, generating efficiencies from removing non-productive redundancies in the service network.

Many years ago DCF responded to a report highlighting the importance of a youth in juvenile justice remaining with the same social worker throughout their juvenile justice commitment. We implemented this change because we understood the importance and the strength of this relationship, what was lost when a child had to start over again with another social worker when a case was transferred from institutional care to the community. The connection that is built between the youth and his/her social worker and the resulting continuity of care are instrumental in the youth's ability to be successful in treatment. The proposed merger is a chance to actually improve the quality of services by allowing the same worker to follow the youth throughout their entire juvenile justice involvement.

This merger will not only make for a more efficient service delivery system through shared resources and knowledge but also a cohesive and effective system of care that will allow youth to take full advantage of the best of both agencies, no matter where they are in the juvenile justice track.