

Center for Children's Advocacy

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF

S.B. No. 307 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM FOR DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES.

February 5, 2015

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law, providing holistic legal services for Connecticut's poorest and most vulnerable children through both individual representation and systemic advocacy. We urge you to pass **S.B. 307**, An Act Implementing A Quality Assurance Program For Department of Children and Families Programs and Facilities. The Center supports this Act, requiring the implementation of the U.S. Department of Justice's "Performance-based Standards Program," as it will significantly assist DCF in improving the programs and facilities it offers.

Board of Directors

Douglas Colosky, Chair
Claudia Connor, Vice Chair
Jill J. Hutensky, Treasurer
Natalia Xiomara-Chieffo,
Secretary
Mario Borelli
Rudolph Brooks
David Cooney
Timothy Diemand
Kathryn Emmett (ex officio)
Robin Keller
Nichelle A. Mullins
Paul Sarkis
Martha Stone (ex officio)
Antonia Thompson

Advisory Board

Miriam Berkman
John Brittain
Brett Dignam
L. Phillip Guzman
Wesley Horton
Elizabeth Morgan
Eileen Silverstein
Preston Tisdale
Stanley A. Twardy, Jr.
Stephen Wizner

Executive Director

Martha Stone, JD
65 Elizabeth Street
Hartford, CT 06105
Phone 860-570-5327
Fax 860-570-5256
www.kidscounsel.org

Implementation of the "Performance-based Standards Program" Is Necessary To Address Deficiencies at the Present DCF Juvenile Justice Programs and Facilities

This past year, allegations from 16-year-old Jane Doe regarding DCF care and facilities have put the department under continued public scrutiny. Jane Doe has alleged that she was denied necessary services while under DCF care, and that DCF programs have failed to protect her, leading to her eventual solitary confinement in an adult prison.

Moreover, the Office of Child Advocate has recently exposed the dangerous seclusion and restraint policies and practices of DCF which have resulted in emotional and physical harm to the youth confined at the Pueblo girls facility and the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. (CJTS)

DCF's own data also demonstrates the need for a more rigorous and expansive system of quality assurance. Of the 252 admissions to CJTS this past year, 52% were the result, not of new admissions, but of youth who had either failed at other congregate care facilities contracted by DCF or whose parole had been revoked because of their lack of success in community based programs established by DCF. In addition, between April 2013 and June 2014, there were 452 arrests in congregate care facilities including CJTS, Pueblo, and residential and group homes run or contracted by DCF. This data alone demonstrates that the system set up to protect these youth needs substantial improvement.

Significant Benefits Will Inure if a Performance-based Standards Program Is Mandated

The proposed bill provides a plan, as well as concrete tools, for DCF to improve conditions and programs at its facilities.

Specifically, the bill calls for the implementation of the U.S. Department of Justice's Performance-based Standards Program, a program for facilities and agencies to "identify, monitor and improve conditions and treatment services provided to incarcerated youths using national standards and outcome measures." Implementation of this plan will:

1. Provide a set of goals and standards, which DCF must work towards meeting;
2. Give access to self-assessment and self-improvement tools;
3. Create and provide reports which help to track progress over time;
4. Provide data from other agencies and facilities for comparison;
5. Give access to effective practices and support from other participating agencies and facilities.¹

Adoption of this national standard is more rigorous than what DCF has presently and will further assist the agency to define measurable goals and help develop strategies to attain such goals.

In addition, the proposed bill requires the sharing of such data compiled and analyzed with the Connecticut Juvenile Training School advisory group, and the Office of the Child Advocate. By requiring other entities independent of the Department to receive and review the data, the bill imposes important accountability measures to ensure compliance with appropriate standards.

Implementation of a Performance-based Standards Program Is Not Burdensome

Implementation of the "Performance-based Standards Program" can be easily implemented – certain information gathered from reports, records, and interviews will be entered into the Program's website, which is then checked by Program staff and used to create graphics tracking the agencies' and facilities' improvements, as well as identify areas of weakness.²

This Program is already used by a branch of Connecticut's Judicial Department, Court Support Services Division, in the oversight of facilities over which it has responsibility. Reports are generated frequently and assist that Division in

¹ See Performance-based Standards, <http://pbstandards.org/initiatives/performance-based-standards-pbs> (last visited Feb 4, 2015).

² Id.

maintaining structured and constant monitoring without costly or burdensome measures.

As evidenced by Jane Doe's tragic experience, and the data cited above, there is definite room for improvement in the juvenile justice services and facilities DCF provides to the children of this state. The adoption of this proposed bill will undoubtedly help DCF tackle the challenges it has been facing in recent times, providing tangible tools and a roadmap for improvement. We ask this Committee to support these provisions of the bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Choity Khan,
Law Student Intern, Center for Children's Advocacy

Martha Stone, J.D.
Executive Director, Center for Children's Advocacy