



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE  
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN  
FEBRUARY 24, 2015**

**IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 841 AN ACT CONCERNING THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE CHILDREN'S MENTAL,  
EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PLAN**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee on Children, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Abby Anderson; I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We work to reduce the number of youth who enter the system and ensure the juvenile justice system is safe, fair and effective for those who are involved. I also serve as co-chair of the Keep the Promise Children's Committee. KTP Children's is a statewide coalition advocating for children's mental health. In alignment with the missions of both the Alliance and KTP Children's Committee, I speak in favor of S.B. 841, *An Act Concerning The Implementation Of A Comprehensive Children's Mental, Emotional And Behavioral Health Plan*.

This bill establishes an Implementation Advisory Board for the Children's Behavioral Health Plan that was released in October 2014 under Public Act 13-178. I was honored to serve on the Advisory Board that worked with the Department of Children and Families and the Child Health and Development Institute to develop the plan. The issues of children's mental health and juvenile justice overlap significantly, as many children in the juvenile justice system have a history of trauma. Juvenile justice systems tend to serve as default children's mental health systems, particularly for children of color. As a result, the kind of accessible, inclusive, easily navigated, parent, youth and family driven children's mental health system conceived of by the Implementation Plan is critical as a way to address the needs of children and families, reduce the size of the juvenile justice system, achieve better outcomes and save the state money.

An Advisory Board of various stakeholders to guide and oversee this process is vital, especially as the children's mental health system crosses so many agencies, departments and branches of government. The task is herculean and while many hands won't make light work, they should make the work easier to envision and move forward. The Alliance supports the creation of an Implementation Advisory Board and I volunteer to serve if asked.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

**Alliance member organizations:** AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Junior Republic, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut, Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children