

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and Members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Michelle Piccerillo and I am the Vice President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association which is the statewide association representing the 102 Youth Service Bureaus in Connecticut. The very role and in fact, state mandate of Connecticut's Youth Service Bureaus has grown to include both advocacy and the coordination of a comprehensive service delivery system for youth. It is based on this role and a 50 year history serving young people and their families, including the provision of comprehensive mental health services that I would like to both testify in support of Raised Bill No. 841, *An Act Concerning the Implementation of a Comprehensive Children's Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan*, and request that the Connecticut Youth Services Association be awarded a voting seat on the Children's Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan Implementation Advisory Board.

In addition to my role with the Connecticut Youth Services Association I serve as the Human Services Director for the Town of Cheshire where we, like most of the Youth Services Bureaus across the state provide clinical services to the youth and families in our community including: family counseling, individual counseling, crisis intervention services, psychological evaluations, gender specific mental health programs, family reunification services, substance abuse assessments and treatment services, and a variety of others. We often struggle to find appropriate clinical resources for our young people that require a higher level of care than that which we can provide and even when we are successful at finding those resources they are often inaccessible or unavailable. The Mental Health Service delivery system in this state is clearly over-extended in regards to services across the life span, but in particular when it comes to our youth. It is clear that the establishment of the Advisory Board proposed in this bill is essential to our state's success in preventing and reducing the long-term negative impact of mental, emotional and behavioral health issues on children. The assessment and information gathering proposed in this bill would facilitate access to available resources. The collaboration of those with expertise and experience in this field would facilitate not only the identification of needs and service gaps as well as a clear understanding of the strengths of the mental health system in the state.

The Connecticut Youth Services Association is a necessary voice in this endeavor; Youth Service Bureaus being the largest collective group of community based mental health service providers to youth in the state and sometimes the *only* resource available to a young person and their family. We are the "go to" agencies for our communities when it comes to clinical resources and support, crisis management, and referral information. We bring to the table expertise in the provision of clinical service delivery to youth and a great deal of experience building bridges and partnerships with community agencies and service providers such as schools, court systems and private practitioners. We have a history of valuable and impactful contributions through our membership on other State Advisory Committees affecting youth. The Connecticut Youth Services Association is greatly invested in both the passing of this bill as well as the vital impact the Advisory Committee proposed in this bill will have on Connecticut's youth.

It is the hope of the Connecticut Youth Services Association that the Committee will see the importance of the establishment of a Children's Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan

Advisory Committee and the vital contributions that the Connecticut Youth Services Association can make in helping the Advisory Board achieve its goals. We ask that you support Raised Bill No. 841 and that you award a voting seat on the Advisory Board to the Connecticut Youth Services Association. Thank you for your consideration.