

**Testimony Supporting
S.B. 843: An Act Concerning Trauma Informed Practice Training for Teachers,
Administrators, and Pupil Personnel**

Kenneth Feder
Committee on Children
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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the committee:

I am a Policy Analyst testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 843, which would require that all teachers and other school professionals receive in-service training in trauma-sensitive practice.

A wealth of research now demonstrates that natural biological mechanisms, designed to defend the body in short bursts against highly stressful situations, can be harmful to development when activated repeatedly, frequently, or over unusually long periods of time as a result of traumatic experiences. **As a result, children who experience frequent trauma often exhibit distracted and disruptive behavior in school, and are more likely to engage in risky behavior such as smoking.**¹

Unfortunately, research shows that teachers and other school professionals sometimes have little understanding of the manner by which trauma begets disruptive behavior. **Rather than responding with trauma-sensitive practice, students who have a history of adverse childhood experiences (such as children in foster care) are pushed out of class through suspension and expulsion.**² Not only does this deprive students of learning opportunity, but it may send children home to precisely the environment responsible for trauma.

Trauma training for school professionals would help prepare them to respond appropriately to negative behaviors common to children with a trauma history. Connecticut already requires in-service training on numerous risk behaviors in children, such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, and risky sexual behaviors. These kinds of risk behaviors are all associated with trauma history, and an understanding of trauma can help schools engage in appropriate practices that deter these sorts of behaviors; it is only natural that trauma training be added to in-service training for school professionals as well. Trauma training could also help reduce the need for exclusionary discipline, which is often a response to disruptive behavior common to students who have experienced trauma.

Finally trauma training for all school professionals would be of particular benefit to students in Department of Children and Families (DCF) foster care, who are among the most at-risk student subgroups in Connecticut. In 2013, the most recent year for which data were available, there were over 1,700 students in Connecticut committed to DCF. One hundred and fifty-five different Connecticut school districts enrolled at least one student in foster care. These students were less likely to pass State standardized tests in all subjects than not only the average Connecticut student, but also the average Connecticut student eligible for free and reduced price meals (a common measure of student poverty).³ School push-out was also frighteningly common for these

children, who were three times more likely to be suspended in school and six times more likely to be suspended out of school than an average Connecticut student.⁴ Trauma training for all Connecticut teachers will help teachers respond appropriately if they have a student in foster care placed in their classroom, keeping these at-risk students engaged with school and out of suspension.

For all these reasons, Connecticut Voices for Children urges the Committee to support S.B. 843, which would help schools offer a superior education to thousands of Connecticut students who have experienced childhood trauma.

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¹ In fact, increased experience of childhood trauma is linked to many of the leading causes of adult death. See e.g., Vincent Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. May, 1998. Available at <http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797%2898%2900017-8/fulltext#section19>.

² See, Marni Finklestein et al., "What Keeps Children in Foster Care from Succeeding in School: Views of Early Adolescents and the Adults in their Lives," *Vera Institute of Justice*. July 2002. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/what%20keeps%20children.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See, Kenneth Feder, "Connecticut's Invisible Opportunity Gap: Academic Challenges Facing Children and Youth in Foster Care," *Connecticut Voices for Children*. Available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/connecticuts-invisible-opportunity-gap-academic-challenges-facing-children-and-youth-fo>.