



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 5, 2015**

**IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 306 AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN
INDEPENDENT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OMBUDSMAN**

**AND IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 307 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A
QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM FOR DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES**

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. In alignment with that mission, the Alliance is in favor of S.B. 306, *An Act Establishing An Independent Department Of Children And Families Ombudsman*, and S.B. 307, *An Act Implementing A Quality Assurance Program For Department Of Children And Families Programs And Facilities*.

Both of these bills speak to ensuring oversight, accountability and transparency in the functioning of the juvenile justice division of the Department. I serve as a member of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School Advisory Board, appointed by the Commissioner. Both of these bills represent recommendations made by the Advisory Board last fall. The members of the Advisory Board include a representative from the Judicial Branch, the Chief Public Defender's Office, the Chief State's Attorney's Office, and a family advocate along with other experts. The recommendations for an independent ombudsman's office and participation in Performance based Standards were consensus recommendations from that group.

The Connecticut Juvenile Training School is accredited by the American Correctional Association and therefore meets those standards. The ACA focuses mainly on the physical facility itself – ensuring that there are appropriate fire alarms and suicide proof rooms, etc. We applaud DCF for holding itself to the ACA standards, but believe they don't monitor all of the elements of a juvenile prison facility that need to be regularly examined. The ACA standards do not have a significant focus on conditions of confinement within the facility, looking at things like use of restraint, use of room seclusion, arrest, etc.

PbS, according to its website, is a data-driven improvement model grounded in research that holds juvenile justice agencies, facilities, and residential care providers to the highest standards for operations, programs, and services. PbS provides a uniform data collection and reporting tool that shows the impact of the services on youths, staff, and families.

PbS was launched in 1995 by the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

The Connecticut Juvenile Training School Advisory Board made its recommendations after conversations with the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division. CSSD operates the juvenile detention centers, where many of the youth who end up in DCF's facilities, also spend time. CSSD is accredited by ACA, just like DCF; however, they also take part in the PbS monitoring. When asked, CSSD representatives said that both tools are important because they look at different elements of the facility environment, PbS looking more closely at conditions of confinement. DCF used to participate in Performance based Standards and while it has continued internally collecting some of the data PbS looks at, it no longer has the advantage of regularly analyzing that data in comparison to national best practices and norms and receiving technical assistance around any areas that show a need for improvement.

In the past year we have seen multiple questions about the conditions of confinement within the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and its Pueblo Unit. The Office of the Child Advocate raised significant questions about the use of restraint and seclusion, as well as suicidality at these facilities. We would ask the Committee to pass legislation to require both an independent ombudsman and the use of PbS to ensure more transparent reporting and understanding of the facilities DCF runs. We strongly believe the use of PbS and an independent ombudsman can lead to greater transparency, oversight and accountability of the agency that serves our most vulnerable youth. The overall goal of that transparency, oversight and accountability is improved outcomes for public safety, youth, families and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

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