

TESTIMONY FOR S.B. No. 843-
An Act Concerning Trauma-Informed Practice Training For Teachers, Administrators and Pupil Personnel

Submitted By: April Goff-Brown, Director of Comprehensive Youth Services Department,
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Submitted to the Children's Committee:

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Children's Committee. On behalf of Catholic Charities, Inc. - Archdiocese of Hartford, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **S.B. No. 843 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND PUPIL PERSONNEL**. We support the inclusion of training for teachers on trauma and its impact on children and their ability to learn. Research shows that trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships and function appropriately in the classroom. Other psychological research shows that childhood trauma from exposure to family violence can diminish concentration, memory and the organizational and language abilities that children need to function well in school. Studies also show that abused children have more severe academic problems than their peers. What gets manifested in the classroom may be a result of oppositional, defiant behaviors that challenge authority and lead to the typical punitive practices including suspensions and expulsions.

In order to help all children reach their full academic potential, school personnel must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to be able to be aware that the manifested behaviors are not necessarily that of a bad kid that needs to be sent to the school office for discipline. Rather, this child might be the victim of trauma and needs support and help instead of exclusion from the classroom.

Let me give you an example. At one school where we have programming, a first grade girl was continually being disciplined. She was distracted, acting out and the teacher did not know what to do. There had been a hint of potential abuse in the family but that had been dismissed a year earlier. By providing a mental health partnership in the school, a Catholic Charities staff member was able to determine that there was domestic violence in the home and the child was acting out in fear, knowing if she would be sent home, she could protect her mother. It was exacerbated when the step father was removed from the home by law enforcement. Services were provided so mom and she could get help and the child was better able to spend her school day learning with fewer disruptions.

Training teaching staff alone won't go far enough, however. Schools also need to be able to set practices in place to support teachers as they build their skills to be supportive to their students, and to build supportive school-wide culture. Schools need to have clear procedures and policies to help traumatized children, many of whom are represented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Schools also need to develop more partnerships with mental health professionals to provide on-site trauma focused clinical services to children and their families to help the child be able to function and learn.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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