

Center for *Children's* Advocacy

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TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSAL IN H.B. 6824, TO TRANSFER CSSD FUNCTIONS TO DCF AND OTHER SPECIFIC CUTS TO DCF BUDGET

Appropriations Committee
February 27, 2015

Submitted by Martha Stone, J.D.

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am the Executive Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a nonprofit law firm dedicated to protecting the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children and youth. I was also plaintiffs' counsel in the case of Emily J. v. Weicker and Juan F. v. O'Neill, the two consent judgments which involve juvenile justice and child welfare systems run by Court Support Services Division (CSSD) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) respectively.

We testify in opposition to the transfer of CSSD to DCF as proposed in H.B. 6824 for the following five reasons:

1. As a result of the consent judgment in Emily J., CSSD improved the conditions of confinement and instituted an array of diversion and other mental health services which have been successful. CSSD was able to exit the consent judgment, including the extension granted in 2005, and since its expiration, has been able to maintain its commitments with an outstanding array of community-based services that have diverted thousands of youth from the juvenile justice system.

2. In contrast, DCF, for the last 24 years, continues to be under a consent judgment in Juan F. Despite numerous attempts, a Court Monitor and continual federal oversight, DCF has been unable to reach compliance on many outcome measures, including two of the most important—case planning and needs met.

3. The Governor's plan to move pretrial male and female juvenile detainees and place them on the campus of CJTS may violate the provisions of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act which has "sight and sound" prohibitions from confining pretrial and sentenced youth at the same institution. It also violates CGS § 46b-140 (k) which prohibits the placement of girls at CJTS.

4. There is no evidence that better outcomes will be achieved as a result of the transfer. The recidivism rate for DCF committed youth is concerning. Almost one-half of the youth who were in the community are now being incarcerated at CJTS. The latest DCF Report shows that of the 252 new admissions to CJTS between January and December 2014, 28% were unsuccessful in congregate care facilities and came into CJTS, 18% were returned as parole revocations and 3% returned as relocations.



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5. CSSD has been nationally recognized as having exemplary programs. For instance, Connecticut has been lauded and singled out for its accomplishments in achieving a “marked decline in juvenile placements.” See “A Handful of States Lead the Way on Juvenile Crime Prevention”, *The Crime Report*, Ted Gest, President of Crime Justice Matters, December 4, 2012, <http://www.thecrimereport.org/news/inside-criminal-justice/2012-12-juvenile-best-practices>;

See also Juvenile Justice Reform in Connecticut: How Collaboration and Commitment Have Improved Public Safety and Outcomes for Youth, Executive Summary, Justice Policy Institute, February 2013, http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/juvenile_justice_reform_in_ctexecutive_summary.pdf

The Comeback States: Reducing Youth Incarceration in the United States, The National Juvenile Justice Network and the Texas Public Policy Foundation, June 2013, http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/Comeback-States-Report_FINAL.pdf;

Common Ground: Lessons Learned from Five States that Reduced Juvenile Confinement by More Than Half, Justice Policy Institute, February 2013, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/jpicommonground.pdf>

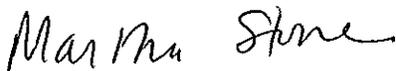
In addition, the Center for Children’s Advocacy opposes the following cuts to the DCF budget:

1. Youth Employment and Training Contracts. The youth committed to DCF are among the most vulnerable population. As a result of our work running the Disproportionate Minority Contact Committee in New Haven, we identified that a disproportionate number of youth who were arrested over the summer were DCF youth. It is imperative given the level of youth gang involvement and youth violence that these youth in New Haven and other cities not be on the streets but in gainful employment.

2. Child Welfare Support Services and Individualized Family Supports. Through our work in our Child Abuse Project, we see many foster families and biological families who are not able to receive the necessary supports from DCF to stabilize the youth in their care with severely traumatized backgrounds. This has been affirmed by the latest DCF Court Monitor’s Quarterly Report dated September, 2014, which found that “the failure to reinvest a greater portion of the savings from reduced use of congregate care treatment and continued cuts to the Department’s budget is harmful to the thousands of children that have been and continue to be diverted..... The insufficient level of reinvestment has exacerbated these (service) gaps and created additional concerns statewide. The gaps include: the lack sufficient out-patient services for children and adults, in-home services, substance abuse services, re-unification services, domestic violence services, emergency psychiatric services, support services for both non-related and related family resources and the need for additional foster home resources.”

For these reasons, we respectfully request that this Committee oppose the transfer of CSSD functions to DCF and restore the cuts to the DCF budget.

Respectfully submitted,



Martha Stone, Executive Director