

Testimony on Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

Appropriations Committee

Submitted By: Alex Kitchener, Government Relations Associate

My name is Alex Kitchener and I am speaking on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2800 members. I'd like to express the NASW/CT's concern about moving funding for court support services from the Judicial Branch to the Department of Children and Families.

It is in the state's best interest to provide quality services for juveniles involved in the court system. In a 2013 newsletter, the Court Support Services division described the necessity of services for this population. "Child delinquents between the ages of seven and 12 have a two to threefold greater risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders than adolescents whose delinquent behavior begins in their teens. Child delinquents tend to have longer offending careers, and as a result, these children will constitute a disproportionate threat to public safety and property. They consume a disproportionately large amount of the resources of schools, the juvenile justice system, and child welfare and mental health agencies." They go on to say, "Treatment services and intervention programs that target these very young offenders offer an exceptional opportunity to improve their long term outcomes, and to reduce the overall level of crime in a community." These treatments are best kept with the Court Support Services Division that have a successful track record working with this population.

Under the Judicial Branch, the Court Support Services Division has offered innovative treatments for their juveniles on probation. A report published in May of 2012 by the Justice Research Center outlined the benefits of Connecticut's court support services division of utilizing a motivational interviewing and strength-based case management technique. The juveniles who received this approach during their probation were less likely to re-offend than their counterparts who received the standard case management techniques. The Court Support Services Division has an effective academy for training their employees. Since 1999, the CCSD Training Academy has provided training to all staff that helps them sharpen their skills and expand their knowledge which has allowed them to build their comprehensive program.

The state's child advocate, Sarah Eagan, was quoted in CT Mirror on this issue. It was stated in the article that she did not understand why the administration would move the CCSD to DCF. She said, "The Office of the Child Advocate has been raising significant concerns about DCF, and until those problems are resolved, our concerns remain". We concur with the Child Advocate on this point. We do not support having DCF take on considerable new responsibilities at this time.

There is no evidence that splitting the functions of the CCSD would result in better efficiency or savings. In fact, Chief Justice Rogers of the CT Supreme Court issued a statement, “Our concern is that we have seen no evidence substantiating how this proposal will result in greater efficiencies or better outcomes in the criminal justice system, the juvenile justice system or the family court system. Additionally, we do not agree that the proposal will result in budgetary savings.” (CT Mirror). Again, we are in concurrence with this statement.

The National Association of Social Workers urges the members of the Appropriation Committee to keep funding for these support services with the Court Support Services Division under the Judicial Branch.