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Testimony Supporting
H.B. 6834: An Act Concerning Collaboration between Boards of Education and School Resource Officers
and
H.B. 6837: An Act Encouraging a Graduated Response Model For Student Discipline

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Education Committee
February 23, 2015

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee,

I am a Policy Fellow 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 strongly supports the goals of H.B. 6834, An Act Concerning Collaboration between Boards of Education and School Resource Officers and **H.B. 6837, An Act Encouraging a Graduated Response Model for Student Discipline.** By increasing mutual understanding of roles between schools and police and data transparency, these bills will help guarantee that exclusionary discipline practices are used appropriately and equitably.

Both bills have two main goals. The first of these is to improve our data collection with regard to school discipline in order to increase its reliability, and to mandate closer scrutiny of these data in order to identify areas for improvement. We applaud this goal and the specific provisions contained in both bills. In particular, we support:

- HB. 6837's clear definitions of school-based arrest and other relevant terms;
- H.B. 6834's mandatory disaggregation of data by sub-groups, with additional sub-groupings by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility and English Language Learner status;
- H.B. 6837's requirement that SDE annually examine data relating to in- and out-of-school suspension, expulsion and arrest; and
- H.B. 6837's requirement that the State Department of Education submit an annual report to the State Board of Education regarding its examination of school discipline data, with the additional requirement that the report be provided to the Education Committee and made public, and include an examination and assessment of disparities.

For a full discussion of the need for better and more transparent data, I refer you to my colleague Jason Berkenfeld's testimony.

I will focus my testimony today on the second goal of both bills: to improve communication between schools and local law enforcement by mandating Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)

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between the two parties. We fully endorse this proposal. In addition, we fully support H.B. 6837's requirement that the MOU's contain a graduated response model for student discipline.

Extensive research into best practices for reducing school based arrests emphasizes the critical importance of clearly delineated responsibilities and expectations, negotiated in person and confirmed in writing, between schools and police.[1] Connecticut has already identified the benefit of, and begun to take steps towards, improved communication between schools and police. The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) has awarded multiple rounds of grants to a number of districts implementing strategies to reduce school arrests.[2] Conditions of the grant include the requirement that districts adopt a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between schools and police.[3] While this funding has served as an incentive to encourage participation, funding is not necessary for schools and police to come to the table to make a clear plan of action for dealing appropriately with students in schools. Districts will have access to a number of resources, including the JJAC's model MOU,[4] to facilitate and expedite conversations. The time spent to clarify roles and responsibilities will likely reap significant time savings down the line in reduced arrests, improved student behavior, reduced confusion and conflict between school and police personnel, and improved outcomes for youth.

A number of Connecticut cities and towns have seen dramatic results from school arrest reduction efforts that included as key components a MOU between police and schools and a graduated response discipline model. Over the last few years, many communities have already identified student arrests as a problem and taken steps to address it in partnership with advocacy groups and local stakeholders. While some actions taken by each city varied based on identified local needs, these projects shared some core features: clarified discipline policies and a MOU between schools and police – the same central tenets found in H.B. 6834 and H.B. 6837.

Stamford, Manchester, and Windham participated in pilot projects with the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. These efforts saw declines in arrest rates beginning as soon as the first month of the pilots, as well as improvements in school climate and security. These pilot programs shared key features, including use of a MOU between police and schools following the JJAC model, a graduated response model that spells out the disciplinary consequences for particular behaviors, and increased use of alternatives to arrest such as Juvenile Review Boards, Substance Abuse Diversion Programs, and Attendance Review Boards.[5] In Stamford, the percentage of total students arrested fell from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.3% in 2013; in Manchester from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.2% in 2013; and in Windham from 1.2% in 2011 to 0.3% in 2013.[6]

Schools in ten districts across the state have been working with the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) through the Connecticut Health and Development Institute (CHDI). Leaders of this initiative focused resources and attention on schools with high numbers of arrests, trained school staff and law enforcement personnel to address students' underlying behavioral health challenges without exclusionary discipline practices, negotiated agreements between police and schools on handling of disciplinary incidents, and increased the use of EMPS, JRBs, and other alternatives to arrest. Many districts saw dramatic results, with school arrests down from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.3% in 2013 in Bridgeport, down from 2.3% in 2011 to 1.2% in 2013 in Meriden, and down from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.3% in 2013 in Southington.[7]

H.B. 6834 and H.B. 6837 would help extend these best practices across the state, codifying a graduated response model, furthering improved communication, and delineating responsibilities and procedures between schools and police, all of which will help to reduce arrests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

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[1] *See, e.g.,* Peter Finn, et. al., "Comparison of Program Activities and Lessons Learned Among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs," (February 28, 2005), p. 23-31, available at http://www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/pdf-files/SRO_Natl_Survey.pdf (discussing in detail the critical importance of defining school resource officers' roles and responsibilities clearly in written agreements between schools and police, and describing in detail best practices for ensuring successful delineation of roles and fidelity to agreements); American Civil Liberties Union, "Hard Lessons: School Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns" (November 2008), p. 18-20 (discussing importance of a memorandum of understanding, "or other formal written agreement, between the school board and the police department, in which the mutual responsibilities of SROs [school resource officers] and educators are spelled out").

[2] Districts receiving grants for 2011 and 2011/12 include: Ansonia, Hamden, Manchester, New Haven, Norwalk, Norwich, Regional School District 10 (Harwinton and Burlington), and Vernon. "School/Police Grant Awards 2011 and 2011/2012," Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Office of Policy and Management (June 2011), available at: http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjjyd/programschoolpolice/schoolpolicegrantawards20112011-2012.doc. Districts awarded grants for 2013/14 include Ansonia, Bridgeport, Colchester, Greenwich, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, Stamford, Torrington, Vernon, Waterbury, Wethersfield, Windham, and Windsor. "Right Response CT Network Grant Awards 2013/14," Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Office of Policy and Management, (September 2013), available at: http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjjyd/programschoolpolice/rightresponsectnetworkgrantawards20132014.doc.

[3] *See,* "Juvenile Justice and Youth Development: Programs and Grants," Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Office of Policy and Management (June 21, 2011), available at: http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2974&Q=471720

[4] "Model Memorandum of Agreement between Schools and Police," Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, Office of Policy and Management (June 6, 2011), available at: http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjjyd/programschoolpolice/moa_6-11.doc

[5] For more information about the CTJJA pilot programs, *see,* "Adult Decisions: Connecticut Rethinks Student Arrests," *Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance* (January 2013), available at: http://www.ctjja.org/resources/pdf/CTJJA-AdultDecisions-WhitePaper.pdf

[6] Connecticut Voices for Children, "Keeping Kids in Class: Student Arrests, Expulsions, and Suspensions in Connecticut, 2008-2013," (February 2015), pp. 44, available at: http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/jj15schoolarrestsreport.pdf.

[7] Connecticut Voices for Children, "Keeping Kids in Class: Student Arrests, Expulsions, and Suspensions in Connecticut, 2008-2013," (February 2015), pp. 44, available at: http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/jj15schoolarrestsreport.pdf. For more information on this initiative, see http://www.ctsbdi.org/.