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TESTIMONY OF
AFRICAN CARIBBEAN AMERICAN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, INC. (AFCAMP)
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
REGARDING RAISED BILL NO. 6834 , AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF
EDUCATION AND SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS
AND
GOVERNOR’S BILL NO. 6837, AN ACT ENCOURAGING A GRADUATED RESPONSE MODEL FOR
STUDENT DISCIPLINE

FEBRUARY 25, 2015

Presented by: Ann R. Smith, JD, MBA
Executive Director

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to speak in support of Raised Bill No. 6834 and Governor’s Bill No. 6837. I am the Executive Director of AFCAMP, a parent-driven nonprofit organization whose central mission is to educate, empower, and support parents of children with disabilities. On behalf of the parents and youth that we serve, I am here today to speak in support of these two bills that propose important mechanisms for reducing school-based arrests. **Both bills require school districts choosing to place police officers in schools to adopt Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with their local police departments.** Such MOUs can help school and police personnel collaborate in a manner that addresses safety concerns while contributing to a positive educational environment and establishing safeguards against unintended consequences.

Police presence in schools has been a long-established practice in many urban communities across our nation. It is a familiar occurrence in several local school districts in which we work with parents of students with behavioral and emotional special needs. Particularly in the case of students who are Black or Latino, having police stationed in schools raises serious concerns about how school personnel and police respond to conduct that is a manifestation of the student’s disability,¹ reflects normal adolescent behavior or otherwise warrants something other than a disciplinary response. Analyzing State

¹ Pursuant to the IDEA and 34 C.F.R. 300.500(e), any child with a disability is entitled to a manifestation determination meeting before the school district can make a change in their placement, i.e., remove the child from school, on account of their conduct. If police are involved in school disciplinary matters, in particular for lower level offenses, the rights of children with disabilities to a manifestation determination may be infringed upon.

Department of Education data, **Connecticut Voices for Children found that Black Students were 4.7 times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts and Latino students were 3.1 times more likely to be arrested.**²

While recognizing the important goal of school safety for all children, the AFCAMP mission and our awareness of the reality of undesirable and unintended consequences of police presence in schools, constrain us to be wary of expanding the practice. In requiring the adoption of MOU's between school districts and local police, **both 6834 and 6837 propose a mechanism to balance school safety, as it is envisioned by increased police presence in schools, with safeguards against unintended consequences.**

The Center for Children's Advocacy Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Reduction Project seeks to reduce the number of school-based arrests for minor offenses and the disproportionate impact on youth of color. School-based arrests are a major factor in the proliferation of the school-to-prison pipeline, a phenomenon in which children of color are disproportionately and unnecessarily referred to law enforcement by schools. **The DMC Reduction Project has demonstrated success and garnered enthusiastic support from law enforcement and schools in several Connecticut cities and towns that have seen reductions in the number of school-based arrests. MOUs between schools and police similar to what is proposed in the two pieces of legislation before you are a key element of the DMC Reduction strategy.**

AFCAMP urges you to act favorably on Raised Bill No. 6834 and Governor's Bill 6837. We also **ask that you adopt the following recommendations that address a couple of the minor differences between the two bills. We recommend that the graduated response model for student discipline be mandatory as proposed in 6837** rather than permissive as in 6834. **We also recommend that arrest data be disaggregated as proposed in 6834** which would require data to be broken out by "school, race, ethnicity, gender, age, students with disabilities and type of offense for which the school-based arrests were made and the number of arrests made annually at each school within the school district." This data is important in order to accurately identify, monitor and redress inequities and disparities in rates of discipline and school –based arrests for students of color and students with disabilities.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

² Connecticut Voices for Children, *Student Discipline vs. Student Population By Race, 2013*, voices@ctvoices.org
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