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**TO:** Senate Co-Chair Gayle Slossberg  
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Senate Ranking Member Toni Boucher  
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Honorable Members of the Education Committee

**FROM:** Paul J. Knierim  
Probate Court Administrator

**RE:** S.B. 1058 An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism

**DATE:** March 11, 2015

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 1058 An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism. The bill proposes to expand the truancy clinics operated under the Regional Children's Probate Courts in Waterbury and New Haven to other municipalities served by children's courts. As the committee deliberates this bill, we thought some background on the clinics might be helpful.

The first truancy clinic opened in Waterbury in 2008. Judge Thomas Brunnock, administrative judge of the Waterbury Regional Children's Probate Court, spearheads the clinic in collaboration with the Waterbury Board of Education and the Department of Children and Families. The clinic focuses on elementary and middle school students and uses a voluntary, non-punitive approach to address the growing complexities of keeping at-risk children enrolled in school. The judge works with parents, guardians and teachers to address the systemic causes of unexcused absences from the classroom and establishes clear expectations for attendance. Specific solutions are tailored to the needs of each family, providing resources, referrals for services, workshops and after school programs.

The program has achieved remarkable results in improved attendance statistics. Of the 29 Waterbury pupils who were in the program for at least a year from September 2011 to February 2013, unexcused absences decreased by 75 percent and excused absences declined by about 45 percent. Unexcused tardiness dropped by 30 percent at one school and 46 percent at another.

In 2014, Judge John Keyes, administrative judge of the New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court, adopted a similar approach for Attendance and Engagement Clinics at two elementary schools in New Haven. Like the Waterbury program, the clinics in New Haven are a partnership among the court, the board of education and DCF. Preliminary figures show that absenteeism among participating students dropped by 50 percent at one school and 28 percent at the other, compared with attendance during the two months that preceded the clinics.

The judges are finding that many factors contribute to chronic absenteeism among schoolchildren, including health and transportation problems, conflicts with parents' work schedules and language barriers that make it difficult for parents to assist with homework. The clinics have succeeded by assisting families in resolving the many underlying causes of truancy.

We note that the legislation limits the scope of the program to available appropriations. Unless funding is available from the school districts, the expenses of program expansion will necessitate an increase in the amount of the general fund appropriation for the Probate Courts.

We are happy to assist the committee in any way as you review this bill.