



Department of Psychiatry MC1410, 263 Farmington Ave., Farmington, CT 06030

TESTIMONY OF DR. JULIAN FORD
on
HB 7050: An Act Concerning the Juvenile Justice System

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
March 30, 2015

My name is Julian Ford. I am a professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I conduct therapy with adult and child survivors of trauma. I also do research on assessment and treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and disorders of extreme stress following complex trauma. I am the Director of the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice within the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and a senior academic fellow with the Child Health and Development Institute. I have led or co-authored a series of research and policy studies concerning mental health and traumatic stress services for youths in the juvenile justice system.

I would like to express my strong support for legislation that places limits on shackling in our state's juvenile courts.

Relationships of trust are important for pre-adolescents and adolescents. When a figure who should be worthy of trust, such as a juvenile court judge, subjects a youth to the humiliation of being chained, the youth will perceive that as a betrayal of trust. The experience of betrayal, despite this not being at all the intent of the court, can break down the adolescent's willingness to engage in restorative actions. The act of

shackling also conveys a message to the adolescent that she or he is socially an outcast and either dangerous or out of control. This can tragically reinforce the adolescent's sense of herself or himself as a fundamentally damaged and unacceptable person.

Adolescents are still forming their own sense of whom they can trust and who they are as a person (their relational bonds and sense of self) and are acutely conscious of how they are perceived. Shackling suggests that they are untrustworthy and inherently violent or uncontrollable. Thrusting these perceptions upon a youth in the process of developing an identity is damaging. That damage may be permanent.

During adolescence, autonomy is an important focus. Shackling takes away the ability to control one's own body, a breach of autonomy at the most basic level. This can lead youths to disregard their own safety and their responsibility to members of the community, posing a barrier to self-determination that can engender a greater rather than reduced fight-flight response..

In controlling the body, shackles also control behavior. One of the developmental tasks of adolescence, which is congruent with the mission of the juvenile court, is self-regulation. Shackles make self-regulation impossible, or a distant second to escape and survival, reducing a young person's own motivation to develop this capacity.



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Shackling shifts focus from controlling one's own behavior to an overwhelming need to break free from those restraints. Instead of thinking, "How should I be behaving right now?" a young person will think, "How do I get out of these?" Self-regulation is critical to a young person's success in the community.

Research has repeatedly shown high rates of trauma histories and high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among youth in detention. Shackling can reactivate memories of trauma and lead to PTSD symptoms, such as anxiety, anger, distrust, non-compliance, depression and dissociation.

Shackling can hinder the ability to participate in court proceedings effectively. The distraction of shackles requires extra processing capacity and working memory. It may stifle sensory-perceptual awareness and thereby make it difficult to perceive and appropriately select important information from the environment.

Shackling changes the way that adults deal with youth. An unshackled youth will be led to behave well through meaningful communication and motivation. Shackles take away the incentive for adults to perform these essential functions.

There are better ways of managing behavior, even with youth who present challenges. Staffing by professionals who understand youth development and the effects of



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trauma will prevent adverse events in most cases. I hope that the legislature will give serious consideration to the harm that shackling can do to young people in the juvenile court, harm that can be easily prevented by your actions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.