

Testimony Opposing Governor's S.B. 951 An Act Concerning Criminal Justice, Juvenile and Family Services

Edie Joseph and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.
Judiciary Committee
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Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Edie Joseph and I am a Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that promotes the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children opposes the Governor's proposal in SB 951 "An Act Consolidating Criminal Justice, Juvenile and Family Service Program" to move the juvenile justice functions from the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). This transfer includes a \$9.9 million cut to juvenile programs.

First, CSSD is structurally well-positioned to continue serving the needs of juvenile justice involved youth. Currently, CSSD is responsible for 97% of the juvenile justice system, and runs this system in line with national best practices, which are towards providing juvenile justice services that focus on keeping children in-home and within their communities whenever possible.¹ In contrast, DCF is responsible for the 3% of juvenile justice services for youth who have been deemed to need out-of-home placement and incarceration.²

Moreover, CSSD has an established history of data-driven, evidence-based, and cost-effective programs and services for at-risk and juvenile justice involved youth. CSSD oversaw Connecticut's "Raise the Age" reforms, which raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18. Researchers from SUNY Albany recently reported that comparing samples from 2009, when 16-year-olds were still considered adults, and 2010, when 16-year-olds were considered juveniles, 16-year-olds processed as juveniles were about 38% less likely to be re-arrested in the two-year follow-up as those processed as adults in the prior year.³ **As a state we are safer today and we are spending less money on juvenile crime. CSSD, the department that spearheaded these reforms, should retain control over these services in the juvenile justice system.**

In addition, we oppose the \$9.9 million cut in funding for pre-adjudication services for youth. Pre-adjudication programs and services – such as trauma services, services for status offenders, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment and family therapy – meet young people's needs before they enter into the deepest end of the juvenile justice system. Investment in the front-end of the juvenile justice system reduces recidivism and saves the money.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out to myself or any other staff members with any questions.

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¹ See, “Facts and Figures on Connecticut’s Juvenile Justice System,” Office of Policy and Management. Available at: <http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2974&q=471564>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Kurlychek, M. and Fowler, E. University of Albany, *Preliminary Draft Raise the Age: Evaluating Connecticut’s Experience*. Preliminary Draft. Presented to Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, February 11, 2014. P. 10