

February 11, 2016

## Appropriations Committee Public Hearing re Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Paula Dillon and I am a Special Education Teacher and I have been teaching in this field with the Department of Children and Families for 30 years. I have been with the Walter G. Cady School at CJTS since 2001. I come before you today to speak to the Governor's proposed budget adjustments. This proposal and budget include some of the planning around the closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, where I have worked as a teacher for the past 15 years. At the Cady School within CJTS I have had the privilege of observing daily student successes, innovative teachers and dedicated staff every day. I can attest to the personal needs of our young men, which I fear are being lost in this process.

Young men are sent to this facility after repeated, unsuccessful attempts in schools or community-based programs elsewhere. The educational opportunities at the training school open a door for learning that many of our students have not had the chance to embrace. For most of our students, school becomes a rewarding experience. Students experience success in school — often for the first time — by increasing their reading abilities, learning a vocation and, in many cases, graduating from high school. These are some of the everyday accomplishments that aren't being talked about enough in our political discourse.

If CJTS is not the right setting, we as dedicated teachers and staff want to help find the solution. It is so important to understand that this population of young men need unique services and cannot be written off in this budget process. Any plan by the state must prevent this population from being sent to Connecticut's prison for Juvenile offenders, placed into private sector programs which are not prepared for these students, or returned to communities without support to an unchanged situation where they originally got into trouble. All programmatic changes must be well planned and fully funded, with education and support services being a main priority, or better outcomes will be unlikely.

The dedicated professional staff at CJTS look forward to working with all stakeholders to develop a thoughtful plan for Connecticut's juvenile justice system. We are here to help and want to be part of this planning process and developing future public policy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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