

**Testimony Regarding:
Raised Senate Bill 72: An Act Concerning a Notification of Support for Foster Parents and
Relative Caregivers and Raised Senate Bill 75: An Act Concerning Detained Youth**

Bianca Rey and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.
Committee on Children
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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Children:

I am testifying on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families. Underlying our work at Voices for Children is the fundamental belief that all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, class, ability, or geography, should be assured of a meaningful opportunity to achieve their full potential. For some children, such meaningful opportunity cannot exist absent state intervention, supports and services. Children in state care—particularly those involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems—are some of our state's most at-risk and vulnerable young people.

I am here to today to support the concepts of Raised Senate Bills 72 and 75, which both work to improve the lives of children in state care in Connecticut.

First, Senate Bill 72 would require the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide foster parents and relative caregivers with:

1. timely notification of services and resources available to them;
2. timely notification of and ability to participate in case planning and review meetings without risk of retaliation; and
3. access to key records that may impact the child's care.

Over the past several years, DCF has made important strides in promoting permanency and normalcy for youth in foster care. In Public Act 15-199, which passed last year, the State established a reasonable and prudent parent standard, ensuring that foster parents would be able to make a broad range of day-to-day decisions for the children in their care.¹ This legislation would further enable foster parents and relative caregivers to participate in children's case planning, and to make wiser, more informed decisions about what is best for them. **By ensuring that foster parents and relative caregivers are notified of and actively engaged in all aspects of the child's care, the**

State can provide a more normal developmental environment for the growing share of children and youth in family placements.

Over the past decade, the State, recognizing that most children do best in family settings, has worked to place youth with families whenever possible, leading to an increased focus on the quality of care in these placements. While the overall number of children entering the child welfare system has declined, a greater share of children are being placed in home-based family settings. In 2003, only 69% of youth who entered foster care were placed in family settings; by 2015, 86% of the children who entered care were placed in family settings.² Many of these children, who might otherwise have been placed in more intensive congregate placements, have complex needs. **By requiring that foster care and relative caregivers be informed of all resources, supports, and services available to them, and giving them access to relevant educational, behavioral, and health records, the State can ensure that these caregivers are able to meet the complex needs of the youth in their care.** A more informed foster family is a higher-quality foster family.

Second, Senate Bill 72 seeks to ensure better conditions, improved transparency, and greater accountability on behalf of youth detained or incarcerated by Connecticut’s Department of Children and Families, Department of Correction (DOC), and Judicial Department (Judicial). The proposed legislation amends the statute to require that:

1. DCF ensure a “therapeutic and rehabilitational” setting for youth placed at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) and the Pueblo Unit for Girls (Pueblo) and adopt a data driven improvement model with performance based standards (PbS) at the facility;
2. DCF submit, in collaboration with DOC and Judicial, a plan to reduce the long-term negative impact of emotional, behavioral and mental health issues on young adults held in confinement; and
3. the Office of the Child Advocate research and prepare bi-annual reports around conditions of confinement for children and youth in the custody of not only DCF, but also DOC and the Judicial Branch.

The Governor has announced his commitment to closing the CJTS and Pueblo facilities by July 1, 2018. As an interim measure, the proposed legislation would directly improve conditions at these facilities, and help to establish a precedent of transparency and accountability in our juvenile justice system. **By establishing more robust data collection and oversight procedures, state agencies can learn how to better serve youth involved in the juvenile justice system.**

The requirements of S.B. 75 are part of a broader juvenile justice reform effort in Connecticut. The Governor, the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC), and involved state agencies are all engaged in a diverse set of projects to build a more robust continuum of care for our youth by expanding access to high-quality preventative, diversionary, and rehabilitative programs. Research in adolescent brain development shows that risk-taking and impulsivity are normative in adolescence; brain development is not complete until age 25.³ When young people are served in

appropriate, community-based settings and go on to lead productive adult lives, the state saves money on costly incarceration, and lives up to its moral imperative to give young people the opportunity of a bright future.

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.

Thank you,

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¹ For more about normalcy and Public Act 15-199, see Connecticut Voices for Children's January 2016 report, "Letting Kids Be Kids: Promoting Normalcy for Connecticut's Youth in Foster Care," Bianca Rey and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D. Available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/letting-kids-be-kids-promoting-normalcy-connecticut%E2%80%99s-youth-foster-care>.

² See "Juan F. v. Malloy Exit Plan, Status Report, April 1, 2015 - June 30, 2015 Civil Action No. 2:89 CV 859 (SRU). Available at: http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/positive_outcomes/pdf/status_report_2015_final.pdf.

³ See Anna C.K. van Duijvenvoorde et al, "Neural Correlates of Expected Risks and Returns in Risky Choice across Development," *Journal of Neuroscience* 35 (2015), available at <http://www.jneurosci.org/content/35/4/1549.full>; see also Monica Luciana, "Adolescent brain development in normality and psychopathology," *Development and Psychopathology* 25 (2013), available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4076820/>; see also Laurence Steinberg, "A dual systems model of adolescent risk-taking" *Developmental Psychobiology* 52 (2010), available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/dev.20445/abstract;jsessionid=42F18C74BA44EC11C6239B92D0BE8DFD.f03t04>.