



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING RE: GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
FEBRUARY 11, 2016**

Good afternoon, Representative Walker, Senator Bye, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Abby Anderson; I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We believe in prevention to keep children from entering the system, and best practice and policy to help kids who do enter the system to be successful.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the governor's proposed budget adjustments for the Department of Children and Families. In short, **the Alliance opposes the governor's proposal for across the board reductions by 5.75 percent.**

The Alliance believes a 5.75 percent cut across-the-board is unwise, for two primary reasons. First, certain individual program line items have more merit and potential cost savings than others. Second, we know that investment in at-risk children and youth rapidly returns significant financial savings and other benefits to the state and its families, both in the short- and long-term.

This budget reduces DCF's funding by nearly \$28 million. This reduction would not allow the department to develop a full continuum of services responsive to the young people in its care. DCF has saved money for the state through a steady reduction in incarceration, which research shows to be the least effective – and most expensive – intervention. That savings must be reinvested in services that will help children be successful, and *keep* our incarceration rate low.

Connecticut's juvenile justice system is being right-sized. Its population – appropriately – is older and has more complex needs. DCF must continue to adapt and change its services to match the needs of this new demographic, and requires the resources to do so. For example, older youth are more apt to need independent living support, substance abuse treatment, vocational readiness training, compared to younger children. They frequently cannot access these services. Younger kids also face service barriers or unavailability.

Further, the child welfare system feeds the juvenile justice system. The most recent report of the Federal Court Monitor warns of caseloads that keep DCF social workers from meeting their clients' needs. **In 2012, 450 youth were arrested out of DCF facilities.** Most were not in DCF care for juvenile justice issues. When DCF is unable to meet the needs of its clients, those clients are then at risk of being arrested while in its care.

In conclusion, Connecticut's juvenile justice system is safer, fairer and more effective than it was a decade ago. Because we have invested in prevention, diversion, and evidence-based rehabilitative, family-centered practice, it is also *smaller* than it was before we raised the age to 18, just five short years ago. This also means that today it is less expensive. We remain in serious danger of reversing those gains. Let us continue the positive momentum, with smart, effective investments in what works. This not only benefits individual children and their families, but also all of Connecticut's citizens and taxpayers.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice / CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, LifeBridge, NAMI Connecticut and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children