



**Opposition to HB 5135, AAC the Closure of the Connecticut
Juvenile Training School and the Pueblo Unit for Girls**

**Submitted by Mishan Holley, Youth Service Officer
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Good afternoon Chairman Bartolomei, Chairman Urban and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Mishan Holley. I am a resident of Middletown.

I have spent the last 14 years working as a Youth Service Officer at CJTS in Middletown. Prior to that, I worked two years as a Juvenile Detention Officer. I am a proud member of AFSCME Local 2663, which represents YSOs and other staff at CJTS.

I am here today to speak in opposition to Raised Bill 5135. I speak from personal experience when I say that closing CJTS and Pueblo would only harm our state's most vulnerable youth. I take great pride in the job that I do. As YSOs we strive to build positive relationships with our residents. For many of them, we are the closest thing they have to a parent or guardian.

Our residents are youth who have engaged in a pattern of crime and have consequently been adjudicated and sent to us through the legal system. Our residents are sent to CJTS only after repeated crimes, oftentimes with very serious charges: weapons, sexual and physical assaults, gang affiliation, drugs, etc.

Many of our residents are the size of full-grown adults. They are big kids with the developmental temperaments of teenagers and oftentimes of toddlers. Whatever their histories or diagnoses, no matter how strong our relationships with them, each and every one of our youth, at any given moment, could become aggressive and violent.

But regardless of their size or inherent propensity to violence, the fact remains that our residents are indeed very troubled and misguided young people who desperately need compassion, respect, guidance and assistance. And who provides all that? We, the staff at CJTS.

Youth service officers provide direct care. Through constant interaction with the residents, we create an environment that fosters safety respect and a strong work ethic we are foster parents while they are in our care to redirect their negative behaviors so they can develop success in the community. Our facility is completely equipped to provide all the services that are young youth need. We are the only facility that is able to tackle the challenge of redirecting are troubled youth to be productive citizens

Closing CJTS would be akin to the proverbial situation of throwing the baby out with the bath water. CJTS is blessed to have the wisdom and commitment of dedicated teachers, clinicians, YSOs, line supervisors and more. We can and must be part of the solution to protect the programs and services that make a difference in the lives of troubled young men and women.

I have included a list of our accomplishments at CJTS. The media, the child advocate and others often neglect to mention them. I thought you would be interested in seeing the depth of programming and services that positively impact the youth at our facility.

Thank your hearing our concerns. I would be happy to answer any questions.

SOME OF THE MANY SUCCESSES AT CJTS

(IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WITHOUT THE PRESENCE AND ASSISTANCE OF OUR YSOs)

Developmental Literacy and Math Programs: Students who are far behind their grade level in reading and math are given intensive classes to boost their skills. Students often make years of growth in a few short months.

Online Learning: Students who are capable of working more independently can progress at their own pace through online learning opportunities. This can expedite their path to graduation, something they once never thought was ever going to be possible.

EcoCrew: Residents involved in the EcoCrew afterschool club learned the importance of being environmentally aware through hands-on sustainability practices including the raising and on-campus care of egg-laying chickens!

Wind turbines: Students were exposed to renewable energy education through learning how wind energy can be generated. Students designed and built a working windmill, which is then tested for effectiveness and efficiency.

Icy Dreams: Students and staff run a breakfast cart in the winter and a frozen ice cart in the summer. Their customers are both on and off campus.

Relationships: Unit staff put on potluck lunches and dinners for the youth at various times throughout the year, especially holidays when the youth may have to be away from family. Staff from throughout the facility enjoy in the feast and festivities.

PBIS: We utilize Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) in our school, a proven effective behavior management system that focused on positive reinforcement.

Student of the Month: Once a month, seven students (one from each living unit) is selected to be our Student of the Month. These students are presented with certificates during speeches given by their teachers in front of the entire school. They are then gifted with a special lunch (put on by our culinary department) and enjoy an afternoon movie.

Guests and Visitors: Wesleyan students have partnered with our students for years, whether to offer academic tutoring or to engage them in drama and performance classes.

Career Classes: Students research careers they might never have even heard of before by using a personalized career curriculum that helps them to discover and target their interests.

- reads a four-syllable word without help for the first time
- gets his first "POSITIVE"
- learns how to trust (for the first time in his life) from a favorite staff
- glows after he is praised for holding the door for a group of teachers
- returns to class after a rough start after accepting counseling and support by a YSO
- touches our snake or our bearded dragon for the first time in his life
- overcomes his fear of water by learning how to swim
- grins with pride when he learns that his reading or math scores have skyrocketed
- shows off a report card filled with As and Bs to a proud parent
- comforts a mom who tears up with joy when she learns of how well her son is doing...

There are so many more stories. Every single day.

