



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

**Submitted by Paul Lavallee, President, AFSCME Local 2663
Feb. 23, 2016**

Good afternoon Chairman Bartolomei, Chairman Urban and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Paul Lavallee. I am President of Council 4 AFSCME Local 2663, which represents social and human services workers in the Department of Children and Families, as well as other state agencies.

We oppose House Bill 5135. I have been around long enough to remember the 2003 closing of Long Lane for girls. When that facility closed we were assured that an appropriate facility for girls would be up and running immediately. It was not. We were further assured that girls who would otherwise go to Long Lane would not be put into adult prison. Sadly, many of these girls wound up on the grounds of York Correctional Institute. We were then told that that was okay, because the girls would be kept away from mixing with the more serious adult offenders at York. Then we found out that the girls were in the same cafeteria for meals at the same time as adult offenders and that they were in classes with adult offenders.

As the people who tend to the needs of the children at CJTS and Pueblo every day, we know that the bricks and mortar of a building do not matter as much as the programs that meet the educational, therapeutic and recreational needs of incarcerated youth.

I have toured CJTS and Pueblo on several occasions. I have spent many hours speaking to the workers at these facilities. I am proud to represent them. They have one of the most difficult jobs that government asks of people. These workers minister to children who come from severely impoverished backgrounds, who have been the victims of horrendous abuse, who often don't have a true friend in the world, or family to care for them. Our workers become the emotional and educational support for these children.

Again, the bricks and mortar do not matter so much to those of us who do child protection work. But keeping children out of more serious facilities, such as prisons, is vital to the development of these children.

While CJTS is a locked ward facility, and we all agree that it was improperly built, it is far more suited to teaching and socializing children than correctional facilities are. If CJTS and Pueblo are closed on the tight time frame that HB 5135 demands, it is guaranteed that many of the children in CJTS will wind up in prison instead.

It is necessary for the state to retain secure facilities like CJTS. Some children have a propensity to violence, and strong emotional and physical outbursts. CJTS continues to demonstrate its ability to effectively address the needs of these children and achieve positive outcomes. Attempts to have nonprofit facilities meet all of this need have been unsuccessful.

We urge caution on this bill and hope that we can learn from the past mistakes of early closings. I urge you please don't disregard our testimony this time. Please don't close CJTS. We don't want to be here in two years testifying that "we told you so," because that means the state will have again failed our vulnerable youth.

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