



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE
Supporting HB 5332 (Sections 1 and 2)
AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT
OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
March 6, 2018**

Good afternoon Senator Suzio, Senator Moore, Representative Urban, and members of the Children's Committee. My name is Christina Quaranta; I am the Director of Policy and Community Connections of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending 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.

The Alliance is in full support of HB 5332, sections 1 and 2, which establish mandates for DCF to develop and implement strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within child welfare practice. The existence of racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare systems within Connecticut and across the country is well documented. The Alliance applauds and supports DCF's recognition of this problem and its commitment to meaningful steps to eliminate it.

Children in the child welfare system are at high risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Youth who transition from child welfare to juvenile justice are termed, "crossover youth." A UCONN study released in 2015 pulled a sample of youth with at least one child welfare system contact and found that 17% of them had subsequent juvenile justice system involvement. When the researchers looked at factors that impacted the likelihood of crossover, they found that African America youth crossed over at a rate of 21%, Hispanic youth at a rate of 20% and white youth at a rate of 14%. Youth with more than one DCF involvement were twice as likely to cross over into the justice system than their peers who only encountered DCF once.¹

Intentional, data-driven work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in the child welfare system will have positive subsequent impact on the overall size of the juvenile justice system and its stubborn racial and ethnic disparities. We fully support the Department's work in this area.

We would like to note that the Office of Health Strategies is creating a data system that would include racial and ethnic disparities and we believe that the data should be connected to other work that is currently in progress in Connecticut.

¹ Randall, K., Sabatelli, A., Farrell, R. (June 15, 2015). *Crossover Youth: Child Welfare Trajectories of Youth Who Move From The Child Welfare To The Juvenile Justice System*. UCONN Center for Applied Research in Human Development. <https://appliedresearch.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1024/2015/11/Crossover-Youth-Technical-Report.pdf>

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions now or at your convenience and can be reached at christina@ctjja.org.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Alliance for Children's Mental Health, Center for Children's Advocacy, CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, LifeBridge, NAMI Connecticut, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Village for Families and Children, True Colors