March 1, 2019

Appropriations Committee

Regarding H.B. No. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Thank you Senator Osten and Representative Walker,

My name is Tina Banas and I am the Director of Youth and Family Services at Family ReEntry in Bridgeport CT. I am a Clinical Social Worker and have worked with at risk youth for the last 10 years. As a provider in the Bridgeport Community, I am also a member of the Greater Bridgeport Local Interagency Service Team (LIST). The overarching mission of the LIST is to encourage collaborative efforts among local stakeholders for assessing the physical, social, behavioral, and educational needs of children and youth in their respective communities that leads to juvenile justice involvement, and for assisting in the development of comprehensive plans to address such needs.

As a direct service provider who understands the needs of marginalized and at-risk adolescents, I am writing today in opposition to the proposed State budget. While the budget does not make additional cuts to the juvenile justice system, it falls short of ensuring that the Judicial branch has the resources necessary to support our youth in CT who are considered to be “at-risk”. This year, when Governor Lamont was preparing this budget, the Judicial Branch officially requested an additional $28 million dollars in order to develop the menu of community based, residential, and secure services needed. Unfortunately, the Governor’s proposed budget provides not one cent more than was allocated last year - $17 million dollars. In working with youth in the greater Bridgeport area, my staff and I hear concerns every day from families, other providers, law enforcement and advocates about the state of the juvenile justice system and how it is unable to appropriately respond to meet the needs of at-risk youth due to lack of funding for critical programs. The current proposed budget significantly undermines the Judicial Branch’s ability to do that very work.

It is morally imperative to help our youth develop into responsible citizens, and for them to learn the why and how of being accountable for their actions. To do this, adults MUST understand and respond to needs of youth by creating and supporting budgets that will ensure the juvenile justice system will have the tools and programs needed to meet its mission of addressing problematic youth behavior by providing safety and treatment to those youth with greatest need: those who present as risks to the community and to themselves.

Thank you Appropriations Committee for reading and considering my testimony today. Please contact me at 203-290-0856 or at tinabanas@familyreentry.org if you have any questions.

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