March 4, 2019

Appropriations

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

Hello, my name is Lisa McKenna I am from Ridgefield, CT.

Thank you Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, for the opportunity to testify today.

I am opposed to H.B. No. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. Because it does not sufficiently support the programs, initiatives and institutions responsible for serving needs of juvenile justice involved youth.

Throughout the past decade, Connecticut and its executive leadership has worked toward creating more effective practices to meet needs of at risk and justice involved individuals. Point in case, governor Malloy pledged to support and improve re-entry services as a result of research and data which indicated that returning offenders have lower recidivism risks if provided with supports and opportunity to re-establish their lives as productive members of society. Many programs such as Project Longevity and StreetSafe Bridgeport were launched, established and gained successful momentum only to experience debilitating budget cuts which impeded their ability to continue appropriate services.

The state has invested and relied on programs such as Juvenile Review Boards and Mediation to ensure diversionary options and stem the cycle of low risk individuals becoming deeper involved in the justice court system; yet both programs have not been sufficiently funded. After 20 years in operation Mediation was eliminated in 2011 from the state budget despite thousands of people being diverted. Each year approximately 3,000 cases within 5 court jurisdiction were referred. Rough estimates showed state savings of approx. $1,864,000. Additionally, stopping the revolving door effect for those served and lowering recidivism rates. Eight years later, this cost effective program no longer exists in the GA/ Adult Courts. Juvenile mediation in Connecticut is only available through a Private non-profit which serves Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford, Torrington and Waterbury Juvenile Court Districts. In calendar year 2018, the program received 108 case referrals and served 440 people with a budget of $70,000. The program budget as it stands is
extremely insufficient. A recent agency analysis showed that the cost of operating one site with an average of 50 case referrals per year cost well over $30,000. Without sufficient funding and direct state support to run this service Juvenile Mediation in Connecticut is in grave danger of ceasing to exist. Leaving countless youth in danger of losing another valuable service which stems the cycle of violence and recidivism

Thank you to the Appropriations Committee for reading my testimony. Please contact me at 203-989-0073 or lmckenna@ryasap.org if you have any questions.