TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
H.B. No. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
SUPPORT OF THE BUDGET FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES – Are Juvenile Review Boards Included?
March 5, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Abby Anderson. I am the executive director 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, best practice to help kids who do enter the system to be successful, and that young people are the most important experts to lead us in achieving those goals.

We appreciate that the Governor’s proposed budget includes $4.1 million to “maintain important clinical interventions and other services utilized by non-delinquent youth following the reallocation of juvenile justice funding by the legislature to the Judicial Branch, further enabling the department to meet Juan F. requirements.” These are critical services, important to the menu of supports youth and families need. Many children “crossover” between involvement with children’s mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice. When DCF has robust, accessible services, they can successfully serve youth who may otherwise end up court referred.

However, the Governor’s proposed budget, even though it adds $4.1 million for community services lost when juvenile justice moved from DCF to the Judicial Branch, does not appear to include the $1.2 million required to restore the funding for Juvenile Review Boards that was lost last year. Juvenile Review Boards (“JRB”) are a front-end, community-based diversion program. Instead of referring a youth to court, police or schools can refer a child to a JRB that can hold them accountable for their actions and provide services to prevent future misbehavior. They are widely seen to be one of the key reasons the size of the juvenile court has been shrinking over the past decade.

Despite widespread consensus on the success and utility of the JRB system, this funding stream for JRBs was were zeroed out in last year’s state budget. The $1.26 million lost had supported 35 of the more than 85 JRBs operating across the state in cities, suburbs and rural towns. One-time, federal dollars were found to piece together partial funding for some of those JRBs funded through DCF, but several communities were unable to maintain full programs and services. There is no plan for ongoing funding when Federal funds run out in mid 2019.

The juvenile justice system has faced steep cuts in the past few years. Juvenile Review Boards have played a key role in diverting youth from that system. Funding for them must be restored here and throughout the state’s budget in order to provide schools, police, and families more

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effective, cheaper ways to address youth misbehavior than sending them to court. Without the options of Juvenile Review Boards, the juvenile courts will face significant added burden.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at abby@ctjja.org.

**Alliance member organizations:**