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.

SUPPORT OF THE BUDGET FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES – Are Juvenile Review Boards Included?

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

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 direct service provider who understands the needs of marginalized and challenging adolescents, I am writing today in opposition to the proposed State budget as it lacks funding to support a critical service to youth at-risk through diversionary means: Juvenile Review Boards. Based on my years of work in the Bridgeport community, I am familiar with the diversionary efforts that the Juvenile Review Board provides and have witnessed first-hand the value that the JRB offers as a front-line intervention to divert and encourage restorative justice. I have seen youth and family lives improve based on interventions put in place through the local JRB.

The Governor’s proposed budget, despite adding $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 programs. Instead of referring a youth directly to court, police or schools can refer a youth to a JRB that can hold them accountable for their actions and provide services to prevent future behavior classified as “at-risk” or “delinquent”. JRB services are widely seen to be one of the key reasons the caseload of the juvenile court has been shrinking over the past decade.

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 JRBs must be restored in order to provide schools, police, and families with more effective, and affordable ways to address youth misbehavior than relying on the court system. Without the options of JRBs, the juvenile courts will face significant added burden, and communities will also be negatively impacted.

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 necessary juvenile services that can provide tools and programs to address problematic youth behavior and offer diversionary and restorative practices. The Juvenile Review Board interventions work and must be preserved to address youth needs.

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

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