Good evening and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Michelle Piccerillo and I am the immediate Past President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, the statewide association representing the 102 Youth Service Bureaus serving 146 communities in Connecticut. CYSA is a professional organization that supports and advocates for Connecticut’s Youth Service Bureau System, a system that is dedicated to promoting the well-being of Connecticut’s youth and families and is bound by CGS sec. 10-19m to do so. I also serve as the Human Services Director for the Town of Cheshire. I realize that I am one of many who will address you today regarding the importance of the Governor's Proposed State Budget and the impact it will have on the services provided to youth and families in this state. Although the main Youth Service Bureau line item in this budget includes a small increase, it is the result of a new YSB added to our system. The addition of a new YSB only strengthens CT’s YSB system and allows us to serve more youth and families. That being said, YSBs also receive funding through a second line item, the Enhancement line item, and unfortunately in this proposed budget that line item has been cut by approximately $31,000. Although this may appear to be a relatively small amount of money, it is a piece of an already small budget (about $620,000) that funds direct services provided by 102 YSBs. Every YSB will feel this cuts and many will have to reduce services as a result. Over the past five years, YSBs as whole have lost around $.5 million of their state funding through budget cuts, all of this while the requirements placed on our agencies have resulted in increased referrals, higher caseloads, an increased number of services and resources to be provided, and overall a tremendous demand on agencies that in many cases are already spread too thin.

With the introduction of the Community Based Diversion System and the associated need for increased community supports for CT’s young people and their families, the demands will continue to grow. Although many YSBs are already responsible for managing their local JRB, YSBs are experiencing not only an increase in the number of people dependent on their services, but also in the level on complexity of the cases we are being asked to manage. These cases often require a significant amount of management, including coordination of care, family and academic support, and constant case monitoring. One example would be the process that has been created for YSBs to respond to truancy cases that are no longer referred to court. Do not be mistaken, it is my belief that YSBs should be the agencies to take these responsibilities, and with appropriate staffing and financial resources, we are properly positioned and prepared to do so.
many of our communities are struggling to juggle the additional responsibilities and to provide an adequate level of services.

In Cheshire last year, we provided over 7,500 opportunities to youth and families for positive youth development, clinical support, diversion, and many others. Although all YSBs vary in size and level of service, if we assume that Cheshire lies somewhere in the middle, the level of service provided to youth and families across the state by our YSB system is incredible.

Youth Service Bureaus are mandated by the state to provide supports and build assets for youth, including special populations such as justice involved youth, youth with mental health needs, other youth at risk, and youth needing services to enhance their education and career advancement. Mental health services for youth are of great concern both statewide and nationally as it has become clear that the mental health service delivery system in many states, including Connecticut, is over-extended in regards to youth and resources are often inaccessible or unavailable. This will not improve as clinical services provided by most YSBs will undoubtedly be reduced.

Youth Service Bureaus are a vital resource for Connecticut's youth and families, and it is not a careless statement for me to make that as the state limits support to YSBs and we become increasingly crippled by lack of resources and financial restraints, Connecticut will see an increase in untreated youth with mental illness, and in youth involved in risky behaviors like alcohol and drug use, truancy, inappropriate sexual activity among peers, violence, including school violence, suicidality and others.

I have testified before this committee before, making much the same argument, and I know that you value YSBs and are aware of the critical nature of the services we provide. I am also aware that throughout the budget process you will be faced with many difficult decisions. I ask that as you weigh your options, you please bear in mind that YSBs do what we are asked to do by the state, and for 50 years we have done it well, despite limited resources. The harsh reality is that we cannot sustain further cuts and continue to provide the same level of service.

Thank you for your time.