

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5508

AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JUVENILE

Title: JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

Vote Date: 3/26/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/20/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.

Rep. Jillian Gilcrest, 18th Dist.

Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Every year the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC) works on recommendations to further the goal of taking care of our at-risk youth. This bill enacts those recommendations which have to do with gender responsive care and plans resulting from various subcommittee work.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Renee Cimino, Director of Delinquency Defense, Office of Chief Public Defender: She testified in support of the bill on the grounds that they agree with the recommendations put forward by the JJPOC. They state that this would look to establish a "gender responsiveness subcommittee" to address problems with the care of youth in the juvenile justice system that identify as female. They state that this looks to expand reentry success plans using transitional support providers up to twenty-four months. They testified that they know the positive benefits that subcommittees provide and how connecting at-risk youth with transitional support systems provides for positive societal reintegration and reduces recidivism rates.

Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate: She testified in support of the bill on the grounds that it will improve gender-responsive services available to youth in the juvenile justice system and improve re-entry services that would reduce rates of recidivism. She testified to the fact that children often struggle finding success when leaving facilities and that this would help inform which areas of re-entry services are working. She pointed to some studies that showed there was a notable positive effect in reducing recidivism rates and pointed out that the recommendations regarding gender-responsive programming correspond with their October 2023 findings about STAR homes.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Marc Donald, President, and CEO, RYASAP: He testified in support of the bill on the grounds of the positive benefits they believe the Credible Messenger programs would bring, if implemented. He testified that their organization's program in Bridgeport is based upon the same foundation as the credible messenger approach and helped hundreds of youth transition into their communities with 88% avoiding arrest or recidivism.

Melissa Goemann, Senior Policy Counsel, National Youth Justice Network: She testified in support of the bill, stating that a positive adult or mentor is essential in a youth re-entry system and the use of a Credible Messenger program would have a positive effect on youth trying to reintegrate back into society and to lower recidivism rates. She testified to the small percentage of programs designed with girls in mind and how these programs are essential for supporting girls effectively. She also testified to the need for policy improvement surrounding the treatment of LGBTQ+ youth who faced disproportionate risks.

Brittany LaMarr, Senior Project Manager, JJPOC Tow Youth Justice Institute: She testified in support of the bill on the grounds that it follows the ten recommended strategies outlined by the Connecticut Reentry Success Plan, created in part by the JJPOC. She points out that section two follows the recommendations of three of the strategies in the plan. She spoke to the critical need of gender-responsive services that target girls as there is a critical oversight in assisting young girls.

Lauren Ruth, Research and Policy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children: She testified in support of the bill and commented positively on specific sections. She stated that sections one, three, and four would create the gender responsiveness subcommittee on the JJPOC and help bridge the gap of care and programs with young people that have experienced gender-based issues. She cited Connecticut arrest data and studies to show that girls within the legal system commit crimes to a high degree for survival and that different services should be provided to address the different concerns that female-identifying individuals make. They also comment on section two that would provide youth with credible messengers for up to 24 months following reentry. They highlight the effects that employment after reentry can positively provide and the lack of opportunities that currently exist within DOC institutions. They believe this access is vital to reduce the rates of recidivism and help formerly incarcerated youth integrate better in society.

Manuel Sandoval, Smart Justice Leader, ACLU-CT: He testified in support of the bill on the grounds that he believes that the credible messenger system is important to the nurturement of youth in the juvenile justice system. He speaks to the lived experience that

Credible Messengers have that allows them to relate to the youth in question and provide positive results. He also points out how it will require school districts to make improvements on their end that will ultimately help with reducing rates of recidivism.

Chris Senecal, Senior Public Policy Officer, Hartford Foundation: He testified in support of the bill, stating that he is supportive of the legislation's response to the gap in support among girls associated in the juvenile justice system with the gender-responsive programs. He testified to one of their collaborative partner's efforts on focusing justice involved youth and young mothers. He stated that the role of school districts is important in the transformative justice process. He supports the use of credible messengers and reentry coordinators following the incarceration of youth as it's an important aspect in lowering recidivism rates.

Martha Stone, Executive Director, Center for Children's Advocacy: She testified in support of the bill but asked that it be amended to include a "plan for the removal of youth from the Department of Correction." She stated that as the co-chair of the JJPOC Reentry Subcommittee, she helped develop the essential reentry plan as there have been little to no effort before to focus on the needs of recently incarcerated youth. She furthered that the subcommittee was unable to create a funding plan for the reentry plan to be successful and that the December 1st, 2024, deadline allows for the opportunity to account for it in the 2025-2026 budget. She stated that the expansion of Credible Messengers up to 24 months is important to reducing recidivism rates. She believes job readiness is an essential aspect in producing positive reentry results and making sure incarcerated youth have access to these programs.

Mary Valdovinos, Credible Messenger: She testified in support of the bill on the grounds of a personal anecdote telling her story of being a youth caught up in the legal system herself and how she is now a Credible Messenger to mentor at-risk youth. She testified how one of her mentees has turned her life around after intervention by the testifier as a Credible Messenger. She also testifies how gender-responsiveness is essential to help bridge any gaps in the current system.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU-CT: She testified in support of the bill on the grounds that the proposed programs in the legislation align with their goals of building safer communities. She stated that expulsions in early education years, which disproportionately effect POCs, make a child more likely to face incarceration later in life and cited studies that showed the effect of expulsion on preschoolers. She stated that this bill would help end the school-to-prison pipeline in several ways.

Lliana Pujols, Policy Director, CTJA: She testified in support of the bill, pointing out that the support for youth girls is limited and often overlooked and section one seeks to remedy this discrepancy. She commented that section two has three elements - mentors, career pathway resources, and data pertaining to the outcome of support for youth - that are important to help ensure youth stay out of the legal system. She stated that they routinely hear that the ideal mentor for youth is someone who reflects them, which is exactly what the credible messenger system is; the system implemented in New York and evaluation indicates its success.

Seventy-eight individuals associated with the organization **Connecticut Justice Alliance** submitted a form letter in strong support of the bill. They state that section one, which deals with gender-responsive services, would help bridge the gap of the inadequate number of services that are tailored for girls and be more effective than providing more gender-neutral programs. They also positively comment on section two, which implements a Credible Messenger system like the one in New York. They believe this will help change the trajectory of incarcerated youth positively and help both reduce recidivism rates and help with reintegration.

Latoya Agnew
Leslie Alvarado
Kwadwo Amaniampong
Orlando Ayala
Samantha Baez
Demont Battle
Ivelisse Berrios
Silvia Bodhoe
Lewis Brown
Xing Cantres
Sandy Chinx
Jallexa Cox
Dayana DaSilva
Samantha DaSilva
Kivan Diaz
Quandre Duarte
Kymberly Escarsega
Briana Espada
Yamara DeAndres Farrar
Jailynn Hernandez
Jamie Ireland
Susan Kaufman
Elijah Kenney
Steve Kenney
Anthony Martin
Mahogany Martin

Tyzai Mazyck
Symphony McCovery
Iah McLamb
Jerome Moorer
Rodney Moorer
Ginette Morales
Martha Morales
Robin Nicholes
Nicole Oeschger
Jordy Ojedis
Jennifer Pauland
Ana Paulino
Kevin Paulino
Janet Perrera
Francesca Pisano
Marco Pujols Sr.
William Pujols Sr.
Chris Pujols
DeAndres Pujols
Lliana Pujols
Leonardo Pujols
Marco Pujols
Maria Pujols
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Carol Singleton
Cassidy Singleton
Dwonye Singleton
Jamar Singleton
Nasean Singleton
Sadie Singleton
Shanyrah Singleton
Sharif Singleton
Yancy Singleton
Imani Soto
Corrine Strong
Shana Strong
Shaunette Strong
Toni Strong
Jacqueline Torres
Victor Troche
Jaclyn Valentine
Stanley Valentine
Milton Wesley
Justin White
Jordyn Wilson

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Murray Cento

Date: 4-2-24