

Testimony of Barbara A. Lockhart, M.S.
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Senator Harp, Representative Woods, and members of The Task Force Subcommittee on Mental Health; My name is Barbara Lockhart and I am the President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, and the Director of Youth Service for The Town of Montville. Currently there are 102 Youth Service Bureaus in Connecticut serving over 145 communities. State statute mandates Youth Service Bureaus to operate as the coordinating agencies of community based services in the provision and delivery of comprehensive programs and services which support prevention, intervention, treatment, follow-up and positive youth development initiatives.

I apologize that I was unavailable to testify in person today, as my work duties have me otherwise engaged. I would like to focus on the issue of mental health as it relates to the overall safety of the children and families in our CT communities. I believe that it is important for you to be aware of the myriad of mental health services that are delivered through Youth service Bureaus in many of CT's communities. With the recent tragedy in Newtown fresh in our minds, CYSA feels that collecting an inventory of mental health services offered by CT YSBs is warranted now more than ever. We all know that when tragedy strikes a community that even though initially these communities are inundated with offers of help and support; the truth is that ultimately communities need and rely on "each other" more than anyone else, and this often includes connecting with and reaching out to community agencies such as YSBs. Often the comfort and familiarity that children and families have with their local YSB has a history. The recent requirements of CT schools to improve school climate and create student success plans ties directly into the overall mental, social, and emotional well-being of both children and families in our communities. Children who feel connected to a network of caring adults, and believe they can ask for help, and adults that are aware of the needs of children provides an opportunity to access the services that may be needed. Often schools refer to and partner with YSBs in their efforts to provide students and their families with the support they need in many situations such as family discord, crisis intervention, etc. Schools also often call upon an YSB as a part of the crisis response team for incidents that may warrant our presence.

CYSA is currently collecting information through a survey which will provide us with a comprehensive inventory of the services and programs provided by YSBs. The survey focuses specifically on YSBs which provide mental health and violence prevention services, as well as YSBs that are part of any school safety teams and initiatives. It will be our pleasure to share the results of this survey with all of you as soon as they become available. Thank you in advance for taking the time to review my testimony and I look forward to working with all of you on this important initiative. Please feel free to contact me at any time to further discuss this testimony or to address any questions or concerns you may have.