



TESTIMONY – HB 5044

Appropriations Secondary Education Sub-Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Secondary Education sub-committee:

My name is Erica Bromley and I am the Juvenile Justice Liaison for the CT Youth Services Association. The Association leads, strengthens and supports a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicated to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families. CYSA is a professional organization that advocates for and works with members in order to continue to best serve youth and families across the state. CYSA has been an integral part of the Connecticut YSB system since its founding in 1972.

I am here today to speak with you regarding proposed budget cuts to Youth Service Bureaus in HB 5044. The proposed cuts of over \$200,000, in addition to two rounds of cuts already absorbed within the last year, would create an environment with less service provision in many communities across the state. The limited amount of funding the YSBs receive from the state is spread across 102 YSBs serving over 145 communities. Funding has always been minimal, yet YSBs have managed to successfully serve thousands of youth and families. The proposed cuts would force many YSBs to make decisions not only about what programs and services to discontinue, but, in some cases, whether or not they can even keep their doors open. YSBs are the only statutorily mandated youth serving agencies through CGS 10-19m and have great responsibilities in serving our youth.

Of particular concern for me in my role as the Juvenile Justice Liaison is the impact that these cuts will have when coupled with the expectations of an increase in services proposed by recommendations adopted by the legislatively mandated Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (the JJPOC). As a member of the JJPOC and the chairperson of its Diversion Workgroup, it is disappointing to see additional cuts to a youth serving system that is being tasked by the JJPOC to divert more youth from the Juvenile Justice System. One of the 3 goals of the JJPOC is to increase Diversion by 20% by 2018. Workgroups were tasked with finding ways to achieve these goals. The recommendations from the Diversion Workgroup to achieve this were presented to the JJPOC and were adopted only a few weeks ago. Those recommendations are now being set in motion with implementation planning. Specific language in the Diversion recommendations task the YSB system, in partnership with the Local Interagency Service Teams (the LISTs) and regional systems of care, to facilitate the

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development of a community owned system of diversion. Recommendations also provide for expansion of YSB prevention, intervention, and treatment services as well as a call for Juvenile Review Boards (the overwhelming majority of which are run by YSBs), to serve more youth, expand their scope, and create more access to those communities without JRBs. In addition, both of the headline recommendations include a pivotal role to be played by the YSB system.

The first headline recommendation is to amend CGS 46b-120 to remove truancy and defiance of school rules as family with service needs offenses from the jurisdiction of the Superior Court-Juvenile Matters. For this to be successful, adequate community and school based diversion services need to be in place and accessible, something that will have a large impact on the YSB system. The second headline recommendation is to implement a comprehensive community based diversion system that appropriately diverts youth who commit crimes, excluding serious juvenile offenses, from involvement with the Juvenile Justice system, and includes expanding the capacity of Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs).

As you can clearly see, the recommendations, which came from the Diversion Workgroup (a group comprised of a variety of experts and agencies in the field of youth) are rooted in a new and improved system of serving youth before they enter into the JJ system, a new system that is reliant on the work of the YSBs. Cutting funding undermines this work and jeopardizes the already existing day-to-day services of YSBs across the state, as well as the forward momentum that has been created in improving our JJ system.

The proposed cuts clearly oppose the understanding and agreement that it is time to enhance our juvenile justice system in order to best serve our youth. You simply cannot cut funding to those who are expected to make the system better.

I thank you for your time and attention and am happy to take any questions.

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