



TESTIMONY – Governor’s Budget Adjustments

Secondary and Elementary Education subcommittee to the Appropriations Committee

February 22, 2018

Senator Slossberg, Senator Somers, Representative Rosario and members of the Committee:

My name is Erica Bromley and I am the Juvenile Justice Liaison for the CT Youth Services Association, as well as a member of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC), and a co-chair of its Diversion Workgroup. The CT Youth Services 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 the Governor’s Budget adjustments, specifically the approximate \$64,000 in cuts in each of the Youth Service Bureau (YSB) Line items. Although \$64,000 in each line may not seem like a tremendous amount, when you add the cuts to YSBs over the last few years, they have collectively lost about half a million dollars. These proposed cuts 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 101 YSBs serving approximately 145 communities. The proposed cuts, in addition to the difficult decisions already made from previous 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.

The work of the Youth Service Bureau system throughout CT is critical. But this work CANNOT be done without adequate resources. In recent years, the Youth Service Bureau system has gained recognition and has been the centerpiece of much of the Diversion work at the state level and through the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee (JJPOC). However, funding has not followed the increasing reliance on the YSB system.

Out of the 2016 Legislative session came a mandate of the JJPOC’s Diversion workgroup to create a Community Based Diversion System. That plan was adopted by the JJPOC in January of 2017 and put into legislation for the following session. Unfortunately, however, it was not funded. Since then, additional changes to the JJ system have gone into effect, including the removal of Truancy and Defiance of School Rules from the jurisdiction of Juvenile Court. This is of concern for the YSB System, as the new

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protocol for handling the Truancy and Defiance cases is through the YSBs. These cases come with an added layer of need and often take additional case management time and creative planning and programming. The funding requested for the Community Based Diversion System in part, supported these needs for more staffing and programming. Without funding, it is unknown how this population will be served. Despite the lack of funding, the JJPOC's Diversion workgroup has been working to help the YSBs implement pieces of the system that are low or no cost, including the use of a universal screening tool, a standard intake process and updated data collection to track these new populations. But again, the provision of services cannot be accomplished without adequate resources.

At the end of the day, YSBs have a tremendous role in the well-being of our youth and they are being turned to for even more as the JJ system shrinks and more emphasis is put on community organizations. YSBs deserve to be funded adequately, especially as expectations continue to rise. If the ultimate goal is to continue to shrink the back end of the JJ system, the front end must become the focus. Without success at the front end, we will never be successful at the back end. It really is that simple. And without adequate resources, achieving this goal and achieving the full potential of the YSB system will not happen.

Today, I am focusing on the juvenile justice portion of the work that the YSBs do. However, a YSB is a multi-functioning agency that provides a variety of services and programs in areas such as mental health, youth development, employment skills training, mentoring, other types of diversion programming, child welfare, and much more. All of these services and programs are done on shoestring budgets, especially after continuous cuts each year. Funding since the inception of YSBs in state statute in the early 1970's has steadily declined, all while numbers of youth served as well as the expectations of YSBs, have increased.

In the coming years, there will be even more expectations on the YSB system due to additional changes, including the removal of the remainder of Family with Service Needs categories from Juvenile Court jurisdiction in July of 2019. These cases are even more complicated and require additional time and resources to achieve success. If the cutting of funds continues in this pattern, there is no way the system can accomplish what is expected of it and what it was set up to do in state statute 45 years ago. The question is, what will happen to the kids who can't be served?

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. 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 to divert more youth from the Juvenile Justice System, again....

And so I ask you today to continue your commitment to our children, see their value, and see the value in serving them in the most appropriate place, their communities, using an existing statutorily based system to create long-term success, keep children from system involvement, and save our state money.

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

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