



TESTIMONY – SB 318 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY INTERVENTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Children’s Committee

March 6, 2018

Senator Suzio, Senator Moore, Representative Urban and members of the Children’s 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 SB 318, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Interventions for At-Risk Youth. Although I support the concept of the bill, creating a more diverse group of participants is critical. As more and more focus is put on community based agencies and services, the need for representation from that sector is important. The Youth Service Bureau System, as designated by the JJPOC’s Community-Based Diversion System as the Community Hub in each town, must be at the table when studying interventions for at-risk youth.

CGS §10-19m establishes a YSB as a multi-purpose youth service bureau for the purposes of evaluation, planning, coordination and implementation of services, including prevention and intervention programs for delinquent, pre-delinquent, pregnant, parenting and troubled youths referred to such bureau by schools, police, juvenile courts, adult courts, local youth serving agencies, parents and self-referrals. The statute also states that a YSB “shall be the coordinating unit of community-based services to provide comprehensive delivery of prevention, intervention, treatment and follow-up services for children and youth ages 0-18 or who are still in school”.

A YSB is a multi-functioning agency that provides a variety of services and programs in areas such as diversion, mental health, youth development, employment skills training, mentoring, other types of programming, child welfare, and much more. Not having the YSB System at the table would diminish the efforts of this task force.

In August of 2017, Truancy and Defiance of School Rules cases were removed from the jurisdiction of Juvenile Court. The CT State Department of Education now recommends the use of a specific referral process by schools to the Youth Service Bureaus for these cases. These youth are absolutely at-risk and

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will often be served by their YSB. 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 agencies handling most of the at-risk youth in their community are not part of discussions regarding interventions for those very same youth, we are doing a disservice to everyone involved.

Another group missing from the list of task force members are youth and families (especially those at-risk or system involved-past or present). We know how critical it is to hear from those receiving services from the systems and interventions that are being studied. Youth voice has been proven to have positive effects on working to improve systems and programming, as they have direct experience. Helping to strengthen the system from the inside is necessary and youth have ideas and solutions that are often missed when their voices are not included.

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. A YSBs key role is to provided services and supports for at-risk youth, based on state statute. This being said, exclusion from discussions that directly involve the programs and services they provide is a set-up for failure and only a look at half the picture. I encourage you to continue on the path of creating a task force to maximize our statewide efforts in collaborating in the most efficient ways in handling our at-risk youth population, however, I strongly encourage you to add the Youth Service Bureau System to the list of required members, as well as add youth and/or families of at-risk youth. Together, those missing voices will give a much better picture of the system and create more robust conversation on how best to collaborate and strengthen the system.

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

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P.O. Box 551 * **Glastonbury, CT 06033**
www.ctyouthservices.org * email: cysa@ctyouthservices.org