



Testimony by Michelle Piccerillo
President, CT Youth Services Association
Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee
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State Legislative Office Building

Senator Slossberg, Representative Rosario, Senator Somers, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker and Members of the Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee,

Good afternoon, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Michelle Piccerillo and I am the President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, the statewide association representing the 101 Youth Service Bureaus serving 144 communities in Connecticut. I also serve as the Human Services Director for the Town of Cheshire. I realize that I am one of many who will address you today expressing great concern in regards to the Governor's Proposed FY 2018-19 Budget and the cuts it includes that will greatly impact the services provided to youth and families in this state. Over the past 3 years Youth Service Bureaus have sustained significant cuts (totaling over \$500,000) resulting in a decrease in our ability to serve the youth and families of our communities, as we are required to do by state mandate. And now the potential for further cuts exists in the Governor's new proposed budget. In addition, there is a proposal to place the funds allocated for School Based Diversion Initiatives in the same line item as Youth Service Bureau funds which raises concerns in regards to the clarity of YSB funding.

As proposals continue to be made in the areas of Mental Health and Juvenile Justice which place increased responsibility on local community supports such as Youth Service Bureau counseling programs and Juvenile Review Boards, state funding is being reduced rather than increased. I know many of you already have a firm understanding of the Youth Service Bureau system and the vital services we provide to Connecticut's residents. It is imperative that you preserve Youth Service Bureau funding and explore the idea of repurposing funds to support YSBs as they rally to respond to the recent recommendations coming from the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee impacting local communities and the YSB system.

YSBs already divert youth under 18 years of age from the Juvenile Justice System. With the elimination of Family with Service Needs referrals for truancy and defiance of school rules to juvenile court, more "raise the age" legislation being discussed, and the proposed closing of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, YSBs will continue to play a key role in expanding and providing diversion programs to meet the needs of our most at-risk youth. The Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee has worked very hard to reform CT's Juvenile Justice System and they are wisely focused on the YSB system as the vehicle of change for this reform. Additional support and resources will be needed at the local level and there should be a discussion on repurposing or reallocation of existing funding to YSBs for their recommendations.



So what will this look like statewide? Youth Service Bureaus are mandated by the state to provide supports and build assets for youth, including special populations such as justice involved youth, youth with mental health needs, other youth at risk, and youth needing services to enhance their education and career advancement. Mental health services for youth are of great concern both statewide and nationally as it has become clear that the mental health service delivery system in many states, including Connecticut, is over-extended in regards to youth and resources are often inaccessible or unavailable. This will not improve as clinical services provided by most YSBs will undoubtedly be reduced. Most YSBs are responsible for the oversight and administration of Juvenile Review Boards in their communities as well as providing the supports required as a result of each JRB case deliberation. The burden on YSBs to support youth and families with these programs and services continues to increase while funding continues to decline.

Youth Service Bureaus are a vital resource for Connecticut's youth and families, and it is not a careless statement for me to make that as the state limits support to YSBs and we become increasingly crippled by lack of resources and financial restraints, Connecticut will see an increase in untreated youth with mental illness, and in youth involved in risky behaviors like alcohol and drug use, truancy, inappropriate sexual activity among peers, violence, including school violence, suicidality and others. As you weigh your options, please bear in mind that YSBs do what we are asked to do by the state, and for 50 years we have done it well on a current total allocation of \$2.6 million spread across 101 YSBs statewide. Before closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Governor's education bill , HB 7035. Section 24 of this bill would change the YSB funding formula which currently keeps our minimally funded YSBs at \$14,000 and holds them harmless when cuts are made. Should this section become law those \$14,000 YSBs would be subject to cuts, reducing their funding, likely resulting in their inability to operate. Securing funding for all of Connecticut's Youth Service Bureaus is an investment in Connecticut's youth and in Connecticut's future.