



H.B. No. 5001

SB2

Testimony by Michelle Piccerillo
Immediate Past President, CT Youth Services Association
Director, Cheshire Human Services
For the Children's Committee and the Public Health Committee
Friday February 25, 2022
State Legislative Office Building

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and Representative Steinberg, Ranking Members Senator Kelly, Senator Hwang, and Senator Somers, Representative Dauphanais and Representative Petit, and Members of the Public Health and Children's Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Michelle Piccerillo and I am the immediate Past President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, the statewide association representing the 103 Youth Service Bureaus serving 145 communities in Connecticut. CYSA is a professional organization that supports and advocates for Connecticut's Youth Service Bureau System, a system that is dedicated to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's youth and families and is mandated by CGS sec. 10-19m to do so. I also serve as the Human Services Director for the Town of Cheshire, the umbrella agency for the Town's Youth Service Bureau.

I am testifying today in support of two bills, House Bill 5001 and Senate Bill 2. Both Bills are proposing increased resources, programming, and funding around mental health services for young people in our state.

The pandemic has left our country, state, and communities facing a level of trauma the impact of which has only begun. There is a consistent and highly concerning increase in youth reporting that they suffer from anxiety and depression, in youth suicide rates, in mental health related emergency room admissions for youth, and in youth substance abuse as our young people struggle to manage feelings of confusion, isolation, fear, grief, and social and school anxiety. As the number of youth in crisis is on the rise, accessing mental health services has become increasingly more difficult, with waiting lists often multiple months in length and hospital beds scarce.

Critical in the response to this youth mental health crisis is the state's Youth Service Bureau System. Some YSBs, like mine in Cheshire, offer accessible, quality, clinical services to school age youth and their families. We work collaboratively with families schools, police and local pediatricians and psychiatrists to identify youth in crisis and quickly connect them to the care they need. Although YSBs are diverse in structure and agencies are developed in response to individual communities we do the same work in identifying youth in crisis and in some way serving as a bridge to critical mental health services. As with the private mental health industry, our YSBs are struggling with capacity. We are understaffed and in many communities under-resourced. Without opportunities to seek and receive funding for the provision of mental health services to youth in crisis, it is clear that we will see an increase in service gaps and our ability to commit to early intervention will be limited as we will find ourselves only able to respond to those in crisis.



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 an increase in untreated youth with mental illness will lead to more youth involved in risky behaviors like alcohol and drug use, truancy, inappropriate sexual activity among peers, violence, including school violence, suicidality and others.

It is clear that both HB5001 and SB2 are bills with a clear connection to Connecticut's Youth Service Bureau System in mind. It is my hope that the Public Health and Children's Committees know, without question, the critical role that YSBs play is supporting youth mental health in our state.

Thank you.