



TESTIMONY – RB 5562

Judiciary Committee

March 23, 2018

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and members of the Judiciary 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 has been an integral part of the Connecticut YSB system since its founding in 1972.

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.

I am here today to speak with you regarding Raised Bill 5562, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, and more specifically, Section 2, the implementation of the Community-Based Diversion System, Section 3, Implementation of the School Based Diversion System, and Section 9, subsection (n) requiring the creation of a report regarding a justice reinvestment plan. As a member of the JJPOC and as a co-chair of its Diversion Workgroup and its several subgroups, I have spent countless hours and meetings with well-diversified groups of experts in creating and implementing the Community-Based Diversion System Plan, along with other tasks, all of which were required through mandates out of 2016 and 2017 legislation.

My focus for most of this testimony is in regard to the Community-Based Diversion System. Just as I testified on this same recommendation last year, I am in support of the full implementation of the Diversion System, however, it must be funded. Last year, I testified that the Diversion system needed to be implemented and funded to begin in July of 2017 because of the many changes that were going into effect regarding diversion and the handing of those cases. Unfortunately, there was no funding allocated and the Diversion System was not officially implemented. And here we are again.....so what is different this year? Well, for starters, Truancy and Defiance of School Rules cases are

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no longer under court jurisdiction and SDE's recommended process for schools is to send those referrals to their Youth Service Bureaus. This was all a part of the Diversion System Plan. The struggle now becomes how can an already underfunded statutorily mandated system of youth service bureaus accommodate an increase in referrals? The repercussions of these changes are still unclear, as it is in its infant stages of implementation; But currently, there are already concerns and issues among schools as well as among YSBs who don't have adequate resources to fully serve these youth and their families.

Additionally, elimination of the remaining FWSN behaviors from court jurisdiction becomes effective July of 2019. This will be an additional burden on the YSBs, as they will need to accommodate this population as well.

The Diversion System focuses on identifying and addressing the underlying needs/symptoms of a child's negative behavior and putting earlier intervention supports in place for the child and family. It also ensures a screening process and service matching. The Diversion System maximizes existing mechanisms to connect children, families, and schools with resources in their community, and diverts children from the care of state agencies.

The Diversion System creates a Coordinating Hub where referrals for negative or risky behavior, or for those at risk, will go using a streamlined and standardized process. The Coordinating Hub in the Diversion System plan is the Youth Service Bureau System. Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) are well positioned to serve as the Coordinating Hub. The benefits of creating a fully implemented Community-Based Diversion System include decreased referrals to Juvenile Court, increased participation in appropriate services and programs, increased family engagement, decreased rates of recidivism, a reduction in the stigma/labeling associated with formal juvenile justice system involvement and a reduction in costs associated with crime and incarceration.

The YSB system is well positioned in the community to provide services, make referrals and most importantly, to engage the families in the process. One key element of successful work with delinquent and status offending youth, as well as with those at-risk, is the ability to collaborate and work with both the child and their family. Without input and collaboration, success is unlikely. The YSB is unique as it is not tied to the court system, the school system, or the DCF system. That can often mean more willingness and a higher comfort level in agreeing to address needs. This Diversion System allows for the Coordinating Hub to play that role, through a standardized process, to engage and then refer for appropriate services, or provide them within their agency.

As we continue to discuss moving away from incarceration and towards community-based services, one concept keeps coming up.....the 4 R's...REDUCE, REFORM, REPLACE, and REINVEST. These concepts can be applied not only to the back-end of the justice system, but to the front end as well. As we talk about creating and implementing a Diversion System, we can REDUCE the number of children who enter a system, we can REFORM the way we are serving and identifying our children prior to their involvement,

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we can REPLACE the current system of referring children to court or other systems in order for them to receive services and create a simplified and streamlined process using and enhancing existing structures, and finally, and most importantly, we can REINVEST funds from where they are currently being used and put them into the community where the children will be going. Funds should follow children....it's that simple.

In addition to the Community-Based Diversion System, I also support the implementation and funding of the School Based Diversion System. With earlier identification and intervention for mental health issues, schools have the opportunity to make a great difference in the lives and future success of our children. This system was created to be a companion plan to the Community Based Diversion system and will work in tandem to increase diversion and increase the use of needed supports and services for our children and families.

The final point of support I want to mention in this testimony is in regard to the creation of a report for a justice reinvestment plan. Just as critical as implementing new systems and moving forward with JJ reform is a commitment to investing dollars in that cause. Without funding the front end, our continued work to shrink the back end will not be sustainable or successful. Critical to our commitment in better serving our youth is investing in them and investing early. Plain and simple.

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. I, and many others on the JJPOC's Diversion Workgroup, have spent much time creating plans that we truly believe are smart and effective and will address the needs of our children and families in an inclusive, engaging way to promote success. But these plans need to be implemented and funded.

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

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