



TESTIMONY – RB 7286

Judiciary Committee

March 20, 2017

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, Representative Rebimbas 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.

I am here today to speak with you regarding Raised Bill 7286, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, and more specifically, Section 7, the implementation of the Community-Based Diversion System. As a member of the JJPOC and as a co-chair of its Diversion Workgroup, I have spent countless hours and meetings with a well-diversified group of experts in creating the Community-Based Diversion System Plan, something that was required of this workgroup out of last year's JJ legislation. I am in full support of the implementation of the Diversion System, however, it must be funded. It must also be implemented for July of 2017, as a System needs to be in place to accommodate the children coming out of court for Truancy and Defiance of school rules, in addition to the increase in delinquency referrals that have been a major focus in the recent years. Additionally, Sections 6 and 9 of this bill call for elimination of the remaining FWSN behaviors from court jurisdiction effective July of 2018. A funded system must be in place for this to happen 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. 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

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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”.

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 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, 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.

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 a plan that we truly believe is smart and effective and will address the needs of our children and families in an inclusive, engaging way to promote success.

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