



TESTIMONY – Raised Bill 363 – AN ACT CONCERNING IMMUNIZATION RECORDS, THE DEFINITION OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND THE REQUIREMENTS FOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES CONCERNING TRUANTS

Committee on Education

March 8, 2018

Senator Boucher, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee on Education:

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. 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”. There are currently 101 YSBs serving 145 communities.

I am here today to speak in **opposition to Raised Bill 363**, An Act Concerning Immunization Records, the Definition of Chronic Absenteeism and the Requirements for Policies and Procedures Concerning Truants. I am specifically speaking to one particular section of the bill, Sec 3, subsection (b) regarding Policies and Procedures Concerning Truants. The language in this section removes the requirement for a school to meet with a parent/guardian, instead allowing the school to merely “make contact” with a parent when a student is truant. There are several red flags with this language. The role of the school is to engage the parents in discussion, allow for both parties to problem-solve and develop solutions and come up with a plan of action. This often won't happen with merely a phone call or text or email. When a student becomes truant, he/she has missed enough school to cause a level of concern that requires the need for adults to work together to address the root cause of the absences and create a plan and correct the barriers or behaviors to re-establish a pattern of good attendance. A simple contact would not enable the opportunity for a robust discussion and problem-solving session to address needs. In addition, holding a face-to-face meeting sends a stronger message to parents/guardians of the

The Connecticut Youth Services Association leads, strengthens and supports a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicating to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families.



importance of attendance. Schools should be contacting parents/guardians as soon as they discover a negative pattern of attendance, so merely contacting them again when their student is officially truant does not seem as if it would be helpful or successful.

In August of 2017, Truancy and Defiance of School Rules cases were removed from the jurisdiction of Juvenile Court. This was done as a part of larger juvenile justice reform with the understanding that youth who don't go to school should not have to go to court to receive services. We know that once a youth touches the court system, their likelihood of returning greatly increases. The JJPOC's Truancy subgroup worked for many, many months on an alternative process for youth who are truant. These efforts were supported by the adoption of the Community-Based Diversion System which came out of the JJPOC's Diversion workgroup. Out of that plan, the Youth Service Bureau System was designated as the Community Hub in each town. The YSBs are designated as the single recipient of referrals from schools, police, other community organization, DCF, court and parents. This includes the truant population. In working with the CT State Department of Education, the subgroup created an implementation process for schools to use for truancy cases.

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. That process includes a referral form which gathers pertinent and necessary information about the youth. This referral process was put into place in February and is now active. This referral form requires a signature from the parent/guardian for the referral to be made (because of privacy laws) to the YSB. If this bill moves forward, and schools are only required to "make contact" with a parent/guardian, those referral forms will not be signed and a referral will NOT be made to the YSB. What then? The school is then just responsible for continuing to try and figure it out without community support? That is the EXACT opposite of what we have spent so much time and energy to remedy. We know that these students need to be supported by services in their community, to engage the family with and be supported by a community agency.

Engagement is key to success, in whatever we talk about. You cannot succeed if you are not engaged and part of the process. We cannot "FIX" this kind of situation without input from the youth and family. It just doesn't work. And if it did, the youth would be in school and attending regularly and truancy would never be an issue. Removing the requirement for a school to meet with a parent is a recipe for inactivity and a lack of viable solutions. And if a parent/guardian cannot be contacted? Then what? The school hits a dead end and has no support from agencies such as a YSB to help support them in finding solutions. Sending them to Juvenile Court is no longer an option. The Diversion System created that new option. Instead of Court, referrals go to the YSB. But that cannot happen without a signature from the parent/guardian, which won't happen if the school isn't required to meet with the parent/guardian.

So I ask you today, please rethink this new language and allow for a process that makes sense, for the best interest of the student and their family.

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

The Connecticut Youth Services Association leads, strengthens and supports a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicating to promoting the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families.

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