



February 16, 2016

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and Members of the Elementary and Secondary Education Sub-Committee,

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 102 Youth Service Bureaus serving communities in Connecticut. I realize that I am one of many who will address you today expressing great concern in regards to the Governor's Proposed FY 2017 Budget and the cuts it includes and I do not envy your position. Further cuts to the budgets of Youth Service Bureaus will have a devastating impact on youth and families all across the state of Connecticut. Over the past year state funding for Youth Service Bureaus has already been reduced twice. If Governor's proposed cuts are approved the total impact to YSB's over the two year budget cycle will be approximately \$314,405, which is a reduction of approximately 10% of an already limited budget. While I understand that this number is small compared to the larger deficit, for Youth Service Bureaus however, this proposed cut is of great significance.

Understand that although there are some Youth Service Bureaus that have a large staff and municipal support there are others that operate with a single employee and little or no municipal support. Should these proposed cuts be put into place, there are Youth Service Bureaus that will be forced to close, and at the very least the larger Youth Services Bureaus will be looking at the elimination of programs and services and likely the laying off of staff.

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 ours, 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. In addition, YSBs have taken on great responsibility in the area of diversion of youth from the Juvenile Justice System. Many 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 Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee recently released recommendations that look to YSBs to increase the community supports they provide in order to support increased diversion. We are working to find ways for YSBs to work with schools to provide support for the School Based Diversion Initiative. The burden on YSBs to support youth and families with these programs and services continues to increase while funding continues to decline. We cannot continue to increase services while our funding continues to be a target for cuts.



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. Diversion programming will suffer greatly and without a doubt, Connecticut will see an increase in young people entering the Juvenile Justice System, thereby increasing the burden on Connecticut's courts.

Securing funding for YSBs is an investment in Connecticut's youth and in Connecticut's future. I would encourage you all to consult the Youth Service Bureau Program Report Card which I have included with my testimony for an overall picture of the impact that Youth Service Bureaus are having on the lives of Connecticut's youth and families. This report card is produced using Results Based Accountability, or RBA, an evaluation strategy that YSBs were among the first to employ. It shows that over 250,000 Connecticut youth were involved with a Youth Service Bureau Program in 2014 and of those surveyed over 80% of the young people who are connected with a Youth Service Bureau self report that their YSB is making a difference in their lives.

As you weigh your options, please bear in mind that YSBs do what we are asked to do by the state, and we do it well. We run our programs using best practices and evidence based strategies and we are successful. We are making a difference, and we are impacting and in some cases saving young lives.

Thank you.

Michelle Piccerillo, CYSA President