



Public Hearing- Chief State's Attorney

October 11, 2019

Hello, my name is Dana Forry and I am the Director of the Bridgeport Juvenile Review Board (JRB) and co-Facilitator of the Greater Bridgeport Local Interagency Service Team (LIST). The overarching mission of the LIST is to encourage collaborative efforts among local stakeholders for assessing the vast needs of young people that leads to juvenile justice involvement, and for assisting in the development of comprehensive plans to address such needs. A Juvenile Review Board is a youth court diversionary program that links young people who have gotten into minor trouble at school or in the community to supports and services and helps them repair the harm done by their actions. JRBs are widely seen to be one of the key reasons the size of the juvenile court has been shrinking over the past decade.

As the search progresses for a new Chief States Attorney, I urge the committee to seek out someone who prioritizes diversion and the use of restorative practices for our young people. Our state needs someone who is focused on investing in community based services and recognizes the need for supports for youth at risk of system involvement. Furthermore, our state needs to focus on justice reinvestment; funding that will be saved at the back end of the system should be reinvested into the communities where youth will be served.

Over the years, the state has made immense progress in increasing the use of diversion. This, along with other efforts, has resulted in a drop in the amount of youth who end up in the deep end of the juvenile justice system. However, community resources have unfortunately not been adequately funded in order to provide necessary services and supports for youth who remain in their communities. This has left a void in the service continuum. These youth who do not receive any support now will likely go on to commit more serious offenses, end up in the juvenile justice system anyways and cost the state more money in the long run.

Community based, supportive programs exist and are willing and able to serve these youth, many with years of experience and success with diverting young people away from court. JRBs and Juvenile

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Mediation, which utilize restorative principles, can continue to serve youth who would be diverted from juvenile court for minor misdemeanor offenses. These programs meet youth where they are, hold them accountable for their actions in a non-punitive manner and connect them with the resources and supports they need to prevent future challenges. Prioritizing diversion and community based services is crucial if Connecticut wants to continue its success reforming our Juvenile Justice system.

Again, I urge the committee to seek out someone who understands, can move forward and ensure longevity of effective practices that will sufficiently meet the needs of the justice system. Thank you for reading my testimony today. Please contact me at 203-989-0566 or dforry@ryasap.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Dana Forry'.

Dana Forry

RYASAP (Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership)

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