

October 11th, 2019

Chief State's Attorney Public Hearing

Throughout the past decade, Connecticut and its executive leadership has worked toward creating more effective practices to meet needs of at risk and justice involved individuals; however in many instances, once initial foundations are created effective initiatives and programs are left to operate without proper support. I urge the committee to seek out a new States Attorney who understands, can move forward and ensure longevity of effective practices that will sufficiently meet the needs of the justice system.

I have served in Connecticut as a Court Mediator since 2002 when mediation in the GA Superior Courts still existed. Today, I still serve and facilitate mediations in our Juvenile court system. In 2011 mediation in the GA courts ceased to exist as a result of budget cuts, lack of insight regarding the process and its positive impact on the Justice system and the people it touched. I have seen this trend repeated over and over again in the approach our leadership has taken when making administrative decision without regard for ensuring effective practices. As a result, our state has gone backwards in its efforts to create successful, innovative and effective outcome in our Criminal Justice system.

Case in point; the state has invested and relied on programs such as Juvenile Review Boards and Mediation to ensure diversionary options and stem the cycle of low risk individuals becoming deeper involved in the justice court system; yet both programs have not been sufficiently funded. After 20 years in operation Mediation was eliminated in 2011 from the state budget despite thousands of people being diverted. Each year approximately 3,000 cases within 5 court jurisdiction were referred. Rough estimates showed state savings of approx. \$1,864,000. Additionally, stopping the revolving door effect for those served in turn lowering recidivism rate. Eight years later, this cost effective program no longer exists in the adult system. Juvenile mediation in Connecticut is only available through a Private non-profit which serves Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford, Torrington and Waterbury Juvenile Court Districts. The funding is only sufficient to support less than one staff on a part time basis, leaving hundreds of unfulfilled opportunities to use the practice. In calendar year 2018, the program received 108 case referrals and served 440 people with a budget of 70,000. The program budget as it stands is extremely insufficient. A recent agency analysis showed that the cost of operating one site with an average of 50 case referrals per year cost well over \$30,000. Without sufficient funding and direct state support to run this service Juvenile Mediation in Connecticut is in grave danger of ceasing to exist. In turn, leaving countless youth in danger of losing another valuable service which stems the cycle of violence and recidivism.

Again, I urge the committee to seek out a new States Attorney who can safeguard and move forward effective strategies for our justice system.

Thank you to the Committee for reading my testimony. Please contact me at 203-989-0073 or lmckenna@ryasap.org if you have any questions.

