CYSA CONNECTICUT YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Testimony – HB 6824

Senator Bye, Rep. Walker and members of the Committee; my name is Alan Slobodien and I am the Director of Vernon Youth Services Bureau and a member of the CT Youth Services Association Advocacy Team. I am testifying in opposition to HB 6824, section T537 that seeks to cut $700,000 from the YSB cost-sharing grant and eliminates the YSB enhancement grant in the amount of $620,000. The Youth Service Bureau system represents 102 YSBs serving 145 communities. During the past two years, YSBs diverted 26,000 youth from the juvenile justice system, 40,483 youth were each provided 20 hours or more of service and YSBs supported 448,000 students with positive youth development and other prevention and intervention programming. All of these impressive services result from two essential components: developing strong, enduring collaborations with a broad array of partners and leveraging local, state, federal and private dollars.

In 1978, the General Assembly and Governor created a state/local partnership resulting in the YSB cost-sharing grant. It was the vision, wisdom and courage of state decision-makers in 1978 that led to this partnership. That vision, wisdom and courage resulted in an investment that has born great fruit year after year for nearly forty years. What does this fruit look like? In 2014, the state/local partnership cost-sharing grant represents a state investment of approximately three million dollars annually. YSB Directors then maximize this investment tenfold. This tenfold leveraging of thirty million dollars is consistently accomplished year after year, struggle after struggle.

Please consider how much greater than thirty million dollars is reaped by the state investment in YSBs. Twenty-six thousand youth diverted statewide from the juvenile justice system in the last two years. If 10 of these 26,000 youth are diverted from incarceration, the state cost could be as great as $3.5 million annually. If 10 of the 40,483 youth provided with 20 or more service hours are diverted from out-placement from the local school system, an additional state cost of $1 million dollars would be realized.

Imagine you visit your personal investment advisor and you are told that your annual investments increased tenfold. Would your response be, “Oh great, let me reduce my investment by 25%, I just don’t want to keep saving so much money!” But we are not considering just dollars; we are considering young people’s lives. In 1978, vision, wisdom and courage were mustered up by your predecessors and acted upon and the YSB system was born. On behalf of my colleagues and the 500,000 youth served by YSBs, I am asking this esteemed body to muster up vision, wisdom and courage – keep the YSB system whole and minimally level fund us. If you choose to make an additional investment, my colleagues and I welcome the opportunity to grow your investment tenfold.

I would be remiss not to mention that YSBs have fully embraced the RBA model and since 2010 YSBs have developed a sophisticated RBA reporting system in partnership with CSDE. Our most recent report card is attached to this testimony.