



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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Testimony of Susan I. Hamilton, MSW, JD
Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection
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Judiciary Committee - March 14, 2022
Raised Bill No. 387

AAC The Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee

Mission Statement of the Division of Public Defender Services

Striving to ensure justice and a fair and unbiased system, the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services zealously promotes and protects the rights, liberty and dignity of all clients entrusted to us. We are committed to holistic representation that recognizes clients as individuals, fosters trust and prevents unnecessary and wrongful convictions.

The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) *supports Raised Bill No. 387 - An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee*. As an active member of the JJPOC, OCPD has worked with the JJPOC and other stakeholders to continue advancing the goals of the youth justice system, including both accountability and improved outcomes for youth. This bill codifies the recommendations approved by the JJPOC, including clarifying DCF's role and responsibilities related to the education of children in juvenile justice facilities, adding youth and impacted community members to the JJPOC and reimbursing them for expenses to attend JJPOC meetings, and expanding the protections of Sec. 54-1 to include pedestrian stops.

In addition, the bill enhances the diversion system by requiring that certain low-level behaviors be referred to the community-based diversion system for a first or second offense rather than arresting children for these behaviors at the outset. Most of these behaviors are already referred to Youth Service Bureaus, Juvenile Review Boards, or other community providers post-arrest, and this would standardize the referral process to ensure that this is

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handled uniformly across the state without requiring an unnecessary arrest. An implementation team established pursuant to PA 21-174 met regularly over the course of the last year to develop an implementation plan, which included looking at data, outcomes, and mechanisms for ensuring accountability, which will include an ability to refer the child to court if the diversion intervention is unsuccessful in addressing the child's needs. In addition to improving outcomes for children, this proposal will reserve judicial resources and services for those children with more complex needs and behaviors.

OCPD would note that the July 1, 2023, effective date on line 431 should be revised to January 1, 2023, for consistency with the approved JJPOC recommendations and urges this Committee to **act favorably** on this proposal.