



**Office of Chief Public Defender
State of Connecticut**

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**Testimony of Susan O. Storey, Chief Public Defender
Committee on Children
February 23, 2016**

**Proposed Bill 5135, An Act Concerning the Closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School
and the Pueblo Unit for Girls.**

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports passage of **Proposed Bill 5135, An Act Concerning the Closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and the Pueblo Unit for Girls**. It is time to recognize that large congregate care facilities are not effectively rehabilitating our youth. While OCPD fully supports closure of both CJTS and the Pueblo Unit for Girls, we feel that the implementation date may need to be extended. It is critical that appropriate alternatives to CJTS are in place before the facility is closed. The Legislature should give DCF and its partner agencies clear time frames and goals for implementing new programs. This must include expanding the continuum of less restrictive residential and community based services for juvenile justice youth. Progress could be monitored by the JJPOC, which is tasked with making recommendations to the Legislature and Governor on juvenile justice policy issues. Because so few young women have been housed at the Pueblo Unit for Girls, it could be closed before CJTS.

It is critical that the closing of CJTS be done in a thoughtful and well planned manner. Effective and appropriate interventions for the youth who are currently committed to CJTS must be developed before the facility is closed. DCF and the other agencies that interact with the youth must identify smaller, less restrictive programs closer to the youth's community in order to successfully treat and reintegrate them into society. The Department has significantly reduced the number of child welfare clients in congregate care and has increased the number of children placed in communities and with relatives or kin. The same model should be applied to the juvenile justice population. Most of the children currently at CJTS have identified mental health needs, trauma issues and educational deficits. Some of these youths will need out of home care. Care must be taken to identify the needs of the population, to integrate the juvenile justice youth into currently existing programs for children with mental health and behavioral issues and to develop new services where gaps are identified.

The goal of any juvenile justice program is to intervene with children in a way that puts them on a path to a successful adult life. Connecticut has reformed so much of its juvenile justice system. It is time for us to be a national leader again, and take the necessary steps to ensure that the youth who end up at the deep end of our system have the full benefit of the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile court. The Office of Chief Public Defender urges this Committee to add a strict timetable for the development of alternative programming to CJTS and Pueblo and to favorably report on this bill.