

Testimony Supporting H.B. No 6489: An Act Concerning School Arrest Reporting

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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

We testify on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a statewide, independent, citizen-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policymaking process that has such a great impact on their lives.

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports the proposal to for the State Department of Education to track school-based arrests in the public school information system and publish annual reports on these data.

As the state increasingly focuses its attention on expanding and reforming the juvenile justice system, it is important for legislators and the public to have access to critical information about the performance of the system. A key measure is determining the demographics of the youth arrested, the location of the arrest, and the types of offenses the result in an arrest. With this information, communities are better able to target interventions to prevent arrests.

In particular, there is a growing body of research evaluating whether schools are increasingly relying on police enforcement to handle student misbehavior. Some states have placed more attention on monitoring the relationship between schools and police departments through annual reporting of school-based arrests. For example, the state of Florida has collected data on the number of school-based arrests, types of offenses, and demographics of students arrested since the 2004-2005 school year. During this year, approximately 1 in 5 arrests occurred by school referrals.¹ In response to the data, third party organizations, including the Florida State Conference NAACP, Advancement Project, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, convened public hearings throughout Florida in fall 2005 to create a dialogue about prevention and reform.² By making the arrest data public, communities—not just schools—shouldered the responsibility of determining strategies to prevent school arrests.

A recent report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) regarding the practice of school-based arrests in three Connecticut districts suggests that school-based arrest data in Connecticut is worth tracking. The report, *Hard Lessons: School-Based Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in the Three Connecticut Towns*, published the incidents of school-based arrests in West Harford, East Hartford, and Hartford schools. They found a wide range in the number of arrests in these

¹ Figure calculated by dividing 26,990 (number of school arrests in 2004-2005 school year) by 120,082 (number of arrests of youth under 18 years old). Figures taken from *Arresting Development: Addressing the School Discipline Crisis in Florida* (Spring 2006) and Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report (2005).

² Six public hearings were convened across the state of Florida to review the school-based arrest data. For more information see: *Arresting Development: Addressing the School Discipline Crisis in Florida* (Spring 2006) available at: <http://www.advancementproject.org/reports/ArstdDvpmES.pdf>.

neighboring towns. The number of incidents per 1,000 students in the 2006-2007 school ranged from 4 arrests to 17 arrests. Their analysis also revealed racial disparities in the likelihood of arrest. In West Hartford and East Hartford, students of color committing certain common disciplinary infractions were more likely to be arrested than white students committing the very same offenses. The ACLU's report highlights an emergent need to monitor school-based arrests in Connecticut.

Currently, the State Department of Education is collecting data on school-based arrests but has cited that the current statutory language of Sections 10-10(a)(b) prohibits them from publishing the data.³ The statutory language must be revised as proposed in H.B. 6489 to ensure that schools do not become a feeder for juvenile courts by equipping them with targeted resources to effectively address student misbehavior within the building.

Connecticut has invested \$6 million in creating the statewide public school information system to allow for longitudinal analysis of student performance.⁴ The capabilities of this database, including setting benchmarks for outcomes, monitoring the practice of school-based arrest, and evaluating the impact of policies to prevent arrests, should be harnessed.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

³ American Civil Liberties Union and American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut. *Hard Lessons: School-Based Resource Office Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns* (November 2008). Available online: http://www.aclu.org/pdfs/racialjustice/hardlessons_november2008.pdf.

⁴ ConnCAN. *2009 Legislative Brief* (February 2009).