



***Division of Public Defender Services
State of Connecticut***

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**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 14, 2013**

**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
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DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES**

**RAISED BILL 169, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ASSESSMENT AND DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN**

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports passage of ***Raised Bill 169, An Act Concerning the Assessment and Delivery of Mental Health Services and Interventions for Children***. Like *Raised Bill 5567, An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health*, this bill focuses on schools as the primary observer and intervention point for children with mental health or behavioral issues. This proposal would require that local and regional boards of education and health care providers assess every child for social, emotional, behavioral and mental health to ensure the delivery of necessary services and interventions.

Connecticut must do a better job identifying behavioral, educational and mental health issues in children. Although this proposal will come with a financial cost, the future cost of doing nothing will greatly exceed any dollars spent today. Schools are in the best position to identify behavioral mental health and educational issues in children. School age children often spend more time with teachers and educational professionals than with family members. Nowhere in society is there a better collection of trained and dedicated professionals than in our schools.

The consequences of leaving these children undiagnosed and untreated are severe both for the children and society. Lawyers employed by or contracted to OCPD to service children and families have spent years arguing that earlier intervention with a child or family would have prevented the child's entry in to the court system. Many of our young clients enter the juvenile justice system because they exhibit behaviors



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relating to an untreated mental health issue. Others get arrested at school, often due to unidentified educational disabilities. Children enter the child welfare system because parents are unable to find appropriate treatment and diagnosis and cannot effectively deal with a child's behavior on their own. We must always be looking for ways to identify problems and treat children at the earliest point and in the least restrictive venue available. This proposal is a good start in creating an effective early intervention system for children. The Office of Chief Public Defender fully supports passage of this bill and urges this Committee to issue a favorable report.