



Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

While I am unable to testify in person at today's committee hearing, I would like to offer the Colorado Children's Campaign's full support for House Bill 18-1156. The Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed to ensuring that structural barriers to opportunity for children are removed, and to ensuring that all students in Colorado graduate from high school prepared for college, careers, and life. If we want the best for Colorado kids, we must prohibit the use of juvenile detention as a means to address habitual truancy. Detention is costly, ineffective, and most importantly, it perpetuates the problem it intends to solve: *keeping students in school and on track to graduate.*

The impacts of taking juveniles into temporary custody for non-criminal status offenses such as truancy is largely unknown -- but the evidence is ample that detaining youth with low level criminal offenses has a profoundly negative impact on their mental and physical well-being, their education, and their employment. National and state research demonstrate that once a child is introduced into the juvenile justice system, he or she is:

- *Less likely to graduate from high school.* Juvenile detention interrupts young people's education, and once incarcerated, some youth have a hard time returning to school. One study found that 43 percent of youth receiving education services in a juvenile detention facility did not return to school after release, and another 16 percent enrolled in school but dropped out after only five months.<sup>i</sup> Not completing school puts students at even greater risk of incarceration as high school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates.
- *Less likely to find success in the labor market.* Academics with the National Bureau of Economic Research found that jailing youth ages 16 to 25 reduced work time over the next decade by 25 to 30 percent.<sup>ii</sup> Looking at youth age 14 to 24, Princeton University researchers found that youth who spent any time incarcerated in a youth facility experienced three weeks less work a year (for African-American youth, five weeks less work a year) as compared to youth who had no history of incarceration.<sup>iii</sup>
- *More likely to be diagnosed with depression and more likely to engage in suicide and self-harm.* One psychologist found that for one-third of incarcerated youth diagnosed with depression, the onset of the depression occurred after they began their incarceration.<sup>iv</sup>
- *More likely to return to a detention facility than his or her non-offender peer.* Detention pulls youth deeper into the criminal justice system. Multiple studies show that the experience of incarceration is the *most* significant factor in increasing the odds of recidivism.<sup>v</sup>



Incarceration puts students at greater risk to return to a detention facility and never reach graduation – and students with truancy court oversight are those who are *already* disproportionately facing adversity. In Colorado, 88 percent of truant students are living in poverty and 70 percent are youth of color, compared with 49 percent and 46 percent among the state’s general youth population, respectively. Truancy is linked to multiple disadvantages within students’ homes, such as alcoholism, abuse and/or neglect.

Finally, the cost of confinement in juvenile facilities isn’t cheap. In 2009, the Justice Policy Institute reported that the average cost of confinement per day, per youth was \$161.<sup>vi</sup> Over the past eight years, Colorado sentenced 1,737 truant students to detention, spending approximately \$279,657 per day for their confinement. Detaining young people for truancy does not make communities safer, and the costs of needlessly doing so are simply too high.

House Bill 1156 would prohibit sending juveniles to temporary custody for truancy, which would mean savings could be reinvested in community and family-based interventions that have been proven to work to reduce recidivism rates and increase student success. We were glad to see Rep. Lee bring this important bill and urge you to vote yes on HB18-1156. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Leslie Colwell  
Vice President, Education Initiatives  
Colorado Children’s Campaign

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<sup>i</sup> LeBlanc, Linda. “Unlocking Learning; Chapter 1 in Correctional Facilities.” Washington, DC: US Department of Education (1991).

<sup>ii</sup> Freeman, R.B. “Crime and the Employment Disadvantage of Youth.” Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (1991).

<sup>iii</sup> Western, Bruce and Beckett, Katherine. “How Unregulated Is the U.S. Labor Market?: The Penal System as a Labor Market Institution.” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 104: 1030-1060 (1999).

<sup>iv</sup> Mace, D., Rohde, P., and Gnau, V. “Psychological Patterns of Depression and Suicidal Behavior of Adolescents in a Juvenile Detention Facility.” *Journal of Juvenile Justice and Detention Services* Vol. 12 No. 1 18-23 (1997).

<sup>v</sup> Holman, Barry and Ziedenberg, Jason. “The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities.” Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute (2007).

<sup>vi</sup> “The Costs of Confinement: Why Good Juvenile Justice Policies Make Good Fiscal Sense.” Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute (2009).