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To whom it may concern,

The Torrington Youth Service Bureau (TYSB) currently serves upward of 20 active cases through the Juvenile Review Board (JRB), a diversionary process aimed at promoting responsible behavior and designed to help solve problems at the root of the negative behavior. Most of the youth are referred through the School Resource Officers due to incidents that occurred at the school. Most school incidents result in 10-day suspensions. Regulations regarding school suspensions state that the grades will stay unaltered until the youth returns to school, at which time they will receive all missed work and complete it within a certain timeframe. However, this is difficult for many of the kids, as they may already be struggling academically and being behind in their school work upon their return adds stress. Additionally, we have seen kids become disenchanted, and more importantly disengaged, during this suspension period. Out-of-school suspensions do not maintain connections. In my perfect world, kids would receive all assignments daily while suspended. This would relieve a lot of stress for this already anxious group of youth.

During the process of working with these youth ages 11-17, we also dealt with kids who were initially suspended pending an expulsion hearing and were subsequently expelled. The Torrington Administrative Regulations Regarding Alternative Educational Opportunities for Expelled Students outlines the process. In my experience, this is not being followed. My Program Director attends all expulsion hearings to provide support for the youth and their families. Even after being assigned to an alternative educational setting, many youth continue to struggle while at their placement. In the end, it is not an equal education. A few youth come to the TYSB to receive tutoring currently. We are aware that some youth are not motivated, may not always attend classes, and some fall asleep while in their alternative educational setting. Youth expelled lose their friend groups and their extracurricular activities, which also contributes to disconnection and exacerbates pre-existing issues.

The TYSB proposes to run a program for JRB youth who receive out of school suspensions, which would require staff engagement with the school to get all essential school work so that, upon the end of suspension, youth do not have to make up work. Youth would come to the TYSB office, complete their school work, engage in discussion about the incident to include conflict resolution, anger management, and substance use education, or more if applicable, and complete a small service project. This program avoids youth being home alone without supervision and direction.

Expelled students who are in the JRB program would have the opportunity to come to the TYSB and receive assistance with their learning needs, which should be based on an Individualized Learning Plan developed by the teachers of the applicable school under the direction of the principal or designee. The document would include learning goals, as well as emotional growth goals. Physical activities through the Northwestern CT YMCA would be included as would a service project. Moreover, services such as substance use prevention or other related programs would be provided when applicable.

The TYSB believes that we are in an excellent position to provide this service, as we have established relationships with these kids, we are already required to remain connected to these youth for a period of six months from the date of the Intake Meeting, and have a thorough understanding of these youths homelife and family dynamics. This program would lessen the risk of these youth becoming disconnected and will improve the possibility for positive reentry to school.