



Legislative Testimony  
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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 2, An Act Concerning the  
Mental, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Children**

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Ranking Members Seminara and Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Children Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of Senate Bill 2, An Act Concerning the Mental, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Children.

The ACLU-CT is an organization that is dedicated to ending mass incarceration, eliminating racial disparities in the criminal legal system, and ensuring that all children can thrive. Among the most vulnerable people who become enmeshed in the criminal legal system are young people under the age of eighteen, who suffer unique harms due to their involvement in the criminal legal system and are more likely to experience even wider racial disparities than exist for adults.<sup>1</sup> The ACLU-CT supports programs that seek to invest in the well-being of our children and that address the root causes as to why children may end up in contact with the criminal legal system, like mental health challenges. Senate Bill 2 makes mental health care more accessible in this state by funding the provision of mental health care in schools, particularly for at-risk teenage students experiencing depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and trauma and conflict-related stresses. Investing in youth is vital to diverting kids away from carceral systems and into social services programs that will help them thrive.

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<sup>1</sup> Colette Marcellin & Samantha Harvell, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut*, URBAN INST. (May 2020), [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youthincarceration-in-connecticut\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youthincarceration-in-connecticut_1.pdf).

The ACLU-CT is dedicated to protecting the constitutional rights of young people and opposes censorship in all its forms. We believe in a society where ideas are openly disseminated, discussed, and debated. Across the country and here in Connecticut, we have seen attempts to censor libraries into removing books by and about people of color, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized people. The First Amendment protects the right to receive and share information and ideas. This holds true in schools and especially in libraries, which exist to enable people to encounter and explore different ideas, topics, and viewpoints. Senate Bill 2 also protects the intellectual health of society at large by designating sanctuary public libraries as spaces that make available books that have been banned, censored, or challenged. A well-functioning democracy requires free and unfettered access to knowledge. Sanctuary libraries will allow children and adults the opportunity to read and discuss literature to which they may not otherwise have access. In addition to allowing the designation of sanctuary libraries, Senate Bill 2 also is essential because it funds libraries. Libraries are often the first point of service for people looking to access available social services, internet and printing, and help applying to jobs. Libraries offer these services and others on meager budgets. Granting libraries state aid will help provide essential services so that communities can thrive.

For these reasons, the ACLU-CT supports Senate Bill 2, and urges this Committee to do the same.