



Re: SB 1 and SB 1511

Committee on Education, Connecticut General Assembly

Dear Committee members:

Domus provides this feedback on bills SB1 and SB1511 as a nonprofit provider that has been supporting disconnected youth since our programs began in 1972.

We appreciate the Education Committee's support of disconnected young people and are grateful for this opportunity to provide written testimony. We are proud to be referenced throughout the *Young People First* report (from Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and the 119K Commission) as providing high-quality school and workforce development programs for these young people. In fact, the *student success coaches* referenced throughout that report are based on the model Domus has been utilizing for years to successfully re-engage disengaged high school students in Stamford.

Domus builds loving relationships with young people facing adversity, empowering them to pursue their path to self-sufficiency. Our two main programs are a workforce development program and a school engagement program utilizing student success coaches (our *family advocates*), a model we created in 1999 and have been perfecting ever since. Through these programs, we work alongside disconnected young people until they graduate from high school or gain employment on the path to self-sufficiency.

Everything we do is grounded in the power of love to transform lives. We build strong, trusting relationships with young people and their families, remove the obstacles that get in the way of youth finding school and work success, and teach them the skills they need to thrive in those settings.

Our approaches to supporting disengaged and disconnected youth are producing excellent results and helping over a thousand young people each day move closer to reaching their dreams.

In our school engagement program in FY24:

- 82% of our students were promoted on time.
- 93% of our students AND families feel the help our staff provide is extremely helpful.
- 91% of our students were retained.

- 87% of students who graduated high school in 2023 were enrolled and engaged in post-secondary or employed on a path to self-sufficiency 12 months after graduation.

In our workforce development program in FY24:

- 94% of young people said the program met their needs extremely well.
- 92% of our youth were retained.
- 94% of the young people who graduated from the program in 2023 remained employed in a job on the path to self-sufficiency one year later.

These young people have many obstacles in their paths—things like homelessness, family trauma, or recent incarceration. Staying in programs where we demand a lot from them and pushing through the frustration of being behind their peers takes courage and perseverance.

We would also ask you to consider changing the following in these bills to enable them to better serve disconnected young people:

- **In SB 1 Sec. 24, pg 28:** Please consider funding nonprofit partners to provide the student success coaches, rather than providing the funding directly to the school district. This would allow for success coaches to push back when school policies do not align with best practices for disconnected students, and it would allow additional flexibility for staff to meet the current needs of these students.
- **In SB 1511 Sec. 3a (9) and (10), pg 4:** We urge lawmakers to use the definitions of disconnected youth found in the 2023 report [*Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis*](#) (glossary, pg 8); since this report was published, many practitioners and funders in the state are now using these definitions, and continuity helps us provide consistent data over time to show our interventions are either effective or need adjustments.

Finally, we hope you will let the *Young People First* report from the 119K Commission and CCM guide your work. The commitment of the commission to hear from so many young people, families, practitioners, and experts, and then distill all that information into research- and evidence-based recommendations, is incredibly impressive. Then, knowing this would save taxpayer dollars but cost money up front, they analyzed where those funds might come from. We are thrilled to have been a part of that work.

Thank you for your commitment to Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. All of us at Domus would be happy to help in any way we can to support these young people.

Sincerely,



Michael Duggan
Executive Director