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### **State Lawmakers Propose Judicial and Law Enforcement Related Bills**

The Judiciary Committee will consider HB 5432, proposed legislation to reduce school-based arrests.

Instead, proposed bill would require local and regional boards of education to adopt and implement policies that would more clearly define the role of law enforcement assigned to schools. It would make public access to data regarding school-based arrests more accessible.

Between September 2011 and February 2012, about 1,000 school-based arrest cases went to court, said Hannah Benton, a staff attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy.

"I think we need to be wary of the effects of school-based arrests on those children, in addition to the effects of suspensions and expulsions," said state Rep. James Albis, a Democrat representing East Haven in the 99th House District.

The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance is supportive of the bill.

"I know that when people hear school arrests they assume we mean weapons and drugs, but we are usually talking about common fights and things like smoking a cigarette," said Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance's Executive Director Abby Anderson.

Because of that, it's important for schools to consider adopting graduated sanctions. This is important, Anderson said, "so that there is knowledge about alternatives to calling or engaging the police."

These alternatives can include better access to psychiatric care for students, Benton said.

"Research has shown that school-based arrests make kids disengage from their education," Benton said. "We are not saying it's wrong for arrests in certain cases. However, we must address underlying problems at the root of these behavioral issues, handle them in a more productive way, and provide access to diversionary and treatment services."

Albis said a 2011 joint report from the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute of Texas A&M University analyzed the records of all Texas seventh graders for a period of time. According to the report more than half of the students had been disciplined with at least one suspension, and those that faced such discipline were more likely to come into trouble with the law down the road.

"I do not know exactly what prompted this bill to be addressed this session, nor am I aware of a disproportionate number of school-based arrests in East Haven," Albis said. "One of the bill's purpose's is to make such data more easily accessible."