GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS DAREK ROBINSON AND I AM THE VICE PRESIDENT OF GRIEVANCES AND LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION LOCAL 371.

ON BEHALF OF OUR PRESIDENT ANTHONY WELLS AND OUR 18,000 MEMBERS THAT WE REPRESENT, WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE CHAIR, COUNCILMAN FERNANDO CABRERA AND THE COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE TESTIMONY.

SSEU LOCAL 371 REPRESENTS JUVENILE COUNSELORS, CHILDREN’S COUNSELORS AND CONGREGATE CARE SPECIALISTS WHO STAFF SECURE AND NON SECURE DETENTION AS WELL THE ACS CHILDREN’S CENTER. THESE WORKERS HAVE UNIQUELY DIFFICULT JOBS.

CARING FOR YOUTH IN THESE PROGRAMS IS A VERY CHALLENGING JOB THAT MUST BE DONE 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, 365 DAYS A YEAR. I, MYSELF, DID THIS WORK FOR 22 YEARS. OUR MEMBERS ALL SIGNED UP TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF AT RISK YOUTH, HOWEVER WE
DID NOT SIGN UP TO BE ASSAULTED BY KIDS WHOSE SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHALLENGES ARE TYPICALLY KEPT FROM US; NOR TO BE SUSPENDED AND CHARGED WITH BOGUS CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS BY OVERZEALOUS OPERATIONAL MANAGERS WHO DONT UNDERSTAND OUR WORK. ABOVE ALL, WE DID NOT SIGN UP TO BE ARRESTED AND PROSECUTED BY THE NEW YORK STATE JUSTICE CENTER ON FREQUENTLY FLIMSY AND SUSPECT ALLEGATIONS.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IS EPIDEMIC IN OR FIELD; BOTH VIOLENCE BY YOUTH ON YOUTH AND YOUTH ON STAFF AGGRESSION. WHAT IS A JUVENILE COUNSELOR TO DO TO PROTECT THESE KIDS FROM EACH OTHER AND US FROM THEM? THE CURRENT SANCTIONED PHYSICAL RESTRAINT MODEL SCM(SAFE CRISIS MANAGEMENT) DOES NOT WORK. IT SOLELY ADDRESSES ONE ON ONE YOUTH AND STAFF INTERACTIONS WHEN MULTI-PARTY BRAWLS ARE COMMONPLACE. SAFE CRISIS MANAGEMENT FOCUSES ON THE USE OF DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES AS A PRIMARY STRATEGY FOR MANAGING YOUTH WHO ARE NOT ONLY VIOLENT BUT, BECAUSE MIRED IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, CARRY TREMENDOUS ANGER AND OFTEN APPROACH THE WORLD AS IF THEY HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE. WHEN DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES FAIL TO CONTROL A SITUATION, WHEN THERE IS SIMPLY NO TIME TO DE-ESCALATE VIOLENT AND AGGRESSIVELY ACTING OUT KIDS, WHAT IS A JUVENILE COUNSELOR TO DO? SCM FAILS TO PROVIDE WORKERS WITH GUIDANCE ON HOW TO HANDLE MULTIPLE PHYSICAL AGGRESSORS, SUCH AS SEVERAL YOUTH ATTACKING ONE YOUTH, RIOTS, AND COORDINATED ATTACKS ON STAFF. WITHOUT ADEQUATE TRAINING, AGAIN WHAT IS A JUVENILE COUNSELOR TO DO?

WE CAN NOT STRESS ENOUGH THE CONSTANT POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENT ATTACKS INHERENT IN A DAILY TOUR WITHIN
SECURE DETENTION. MOST RECENTLY, SEVERAL RESIDENTS FROM VARIOUS GANGS EXITED THEIR PROSPECTIVE CLASSROOMS AND ATTACKED EACH OTHER. AS A RESULT, THE JUVENILE COUNSELORS WHO PHYSICALLY INTERVENTED SUSTAINED MULTIPLE INJURIES THE MOST SERIOUS BEING A CONCUSSION. ANOTHER MORE RECENT INCIDENT, A JUVENILE COUNSELOR WAS PUNCHED WITH SUCH FORCE THAT HIS CHEEK WAS TORN OPEN BY HIS TOOTH AND A SPECIAL OFFICER, RESPONDING TO AID ONE OF OUR MEMBERS WHO WAS UNDER ATTACK, HIMSELF WAS RENDERED COMATOSE AFTER BEING ASSAULTED BY A GROUP OF RESIDENTS.

ACS FAILS ITS FRONT LINE WORKFORCE BY IGNORING GUIDELINES WITHIN THE SAFE CRISIS MANAGEMENT MODEL THAT WOULD ENABLE JUVENILE COUNSELORS TO DO THEIR JOBS MORE EFFECTIVELY. SPECIFICALLY, SCM TRAINING MATERIALS PRESUME AND EXPECT THAT STAFF IS COGNIZANT OF A RESIDENTS MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES THAT MAY IMPACT BEHAVIOR. SIMILARLY, ANY PRIOR HISTORY OF CONFLICT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW AS WELL. SCM CORRECTLY ESPouses THAT THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING RESIDENTS UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THEIR DIAGNOSIS RECOGNIZING TRIGGERS AND RESPONDING HUMANELY AND APPROPRIATELY. RESIDENTS IN SECURE JUVENILE DETENTION OFTEN HAVE MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES AND VIOLENT HISTORIES KNOWN TO ACS; BUT, JUVENILE COUNSELORS ARE NOT ADVISED OF THIS NOR COUNSELED ON HOW BEST TO APPROACH SUCH RESIDENTS. WHILE SCM TRAINING MATERIALS CAUTION AND ENCOURAGE STAFF TO UNDERSTAND HOW A RESIDENTS DIAGNOSIS MAY IMPACT BEHAVIOR AND HOW TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY, ACS DECLINES TO GIVE STAFF THESE TOOLS. INSTEAD, JUVENILE COUNSELORS ARE DELIBERATELY LEFT IN THE DARK. ACS RESTRICTS ACCESS TO THE VERY INFORMATION THAT SCM
INSTRUCTS THAT WE NEED TO HAVE TO DO OUR JOBS AND KEEP JUVENILE FACILITIES SAFE AND FOR STAFF AND RESIDENTS ALIKE.

OUR MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING IS MINIMAL AND DOES LITTLE GOOD WHEN ACS REFUSES TO LET US KNOW HOW AND WHEN A RESIDENTS MENTAL HEALTH MAY BE, AN IMPORTANT AND CRITICAL FACTOR IN CONTROLLING THEIR OUTBURST.

RECENTLY, OUR MEMBERS HAVE FACED THE REVAMPING OF NEW YORK STATES SYSTEM OF CHILD ABUSE OVERSIGHT. THE NEWLY FORMED NEW YORK STATE JUSTICE CENTER HAS SWOOPED IN WITHOUT ANY OPPOSITION OR CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE FROM ACS. THE JUSTICE CENTER HAS LAUNCHED REPEATED ATTACKS ON WORKERS WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN VICTIMIZED AT WORK, HARSPLY CRITICIZING AND SEEKING TO CRIMINALIZE EVENTS WE ARE HELPLESS TO FORESEE AND TOO OFTEN UNABLE TO CONTROL. THE JUSTICE CENTER MINIMIZES ITS COMMITMENTS OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SIGNED UP FOR THIS MOST CHALLENGING CAREER, THREATENING THEIR LIVELIHOODS INSTEAD OF WORKING WITH US TO IMPROVE THE SYSTEM FOR ALL OF ITS PARTICIPANTS.

ACS EMPLOYMENT LAW UNIT HAS REPEATEDLY TAKEN A POSITION OF MONDAY MORNING QUARTER BACKING AS IT PERTAINS TO ITS REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS WHICH IS ALWAYS BIASED TOWARD BLAME AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION AND NEVER DIRECTED TOWARD DEVELOPING BETTER TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE SAFETY AND WELL BEING OF ALL CONCERNED. IN PRACTICE, WHEN AN INCIDENT OCCURS IS SECURE DETENTION OR AT THE CHILDREN CENTERS, THE VIDEO FOOTAGE IS REVIEWED AND EVERY INVOLVED JUVENILE COUNSELOR, ASSOCIATE
JUVENILE COUNSELOR, CHILDREN COUNSELOR OR CONGREGATE CARE SPECIALIST IS THEN INVESTIGATED AND CHARGED. THIS IS AN OUT RAGE, PARTICULARLY SINCE ACS LEADERSHIP, WHETHER AT THE FACILITY OR EXECUTIVE LEVEL, HAS NOT PRESENTED ANY SOLUTIONS NOR ENGAGED THE UNION IN ANY CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE. WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY, BUT WE ARE TREATED THAT WAY. TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, ACS HAS APPROVED A BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROGRAM (ASPIRE) THAT ASSURES ALL YOUTH THAT THERE WILL BE NO CONSEQUENCE FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR THUS ENCOURAGING MORE MISBEHAVIOR. THE FAILURE TO RE-ARREST YOUTH IN DETENTION AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF CITY PROPERTY, YOUTH ON YOUTH ASSAULT, YOUTH ON STAFF ASSAULT OR MANY FORMS OF AGGRESSIVE MISBEHAVIOR LIKE SPITTING ON STAFF IS BLAMED ON THE FIVE DISTRICT ATTORNEYS OFFICES THAT ACS DOES LITTLE TO NOTHING, TO ENGAGE. SO AGAIN WE ASK, WHAT IS A JUVENILE COUNSELOR TO DO?

AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, MORALE IS LOW, THE RETENTION RATE OF STAFF IS LOW, AND MORE AND MORE SENIOR PERSONNEL ARE QUESTIONING THIS CAREER CHOICE.

SSEU LOCAL 371 IS COMMITTED TO THE MISSION OF PROVIDING A SAFE, SECURE, CARING, AND CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS IN NON SECURE PROGRAMS, NONSECURE DETENTION, THE CHILDREN CENTER AS WELL AS SECURE DETENTION. WE NEED ACS TO JOIN US IN THAT MISSION AND TO ENTERTAIN THE PLEAS AND CONCERNS OF VETERAN AND EXPERIENCED WORKERS AS PARTNERS NOT ADVERSARIES.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE THIS TESTIMONY. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO RESPOND TO ANY QUESTIONS.