

**Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers
CT Kids Speak
State Armory
November 15, 2011**

Good morning. I first want to thank the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities for inviting me to come today.

Personally, I really enjoy speaking to teenagers like you because I know you can make a difference. I have two kids – my son has just started college in California and my daughter recently graduated from college and is currently working in Italy.

I know from my own kids' experience that the world can be a very intimidating place these days, and I can suggest to you that the best way to meet these challenges head on is to educate yourself about as much as you possibly can. And, to take that a step further, to work each day become a leader, rather than a follower.

First of all, how do you go about educating yourself? Here are some ideas: Read the newspapers online and find out what's happening in the world. You literally have access to the world online. Take advantage of it. Read the classics – read Hemingway, Dickens, Harper Lee. Go to museums, art galleries and learn about history. Talk to people face to face about things that interest you. It's actually okay to be interested because it makes you interesting. In other words, just don't sit in front of the computer and TV all day long looking at a screen. And, as a personal plea, learn about the three branches of government, and particularly about the courts.

In just a few years, you will be eligible to serve on a jury and you need to know why this is such an important duty and privilege for an American citizen.

We have a court system that is admired by the world and we are going to be relying on you to keep it going.

Moving on to the second question, how do you become a leader? It is clear to me that you already have some idea of the correct answer to this question, as you are here today. I don't believe that anyone is a quote, unquote, born leader or a born follower for that matter. I do believe, however, that the people around you influence the path that you take.

I am speaking from the perspective of having worked in the juvenile courts throughout Connecticut. Both you and I know that there are two certain ways to take yourself off the leadership track. One is drugs and the other is not taking full advantage of what your school has to offer. So every time you say no to drugs or to skipping classes you are already taking the steps necessary to becoming a leader.

Part of the responsibility of leading, you see, means sometimes doing the right thing even though it may not be popular. There is going to come a time when you are going to have to make a choice. It's actually going to be a pretty clear moment when you are going to step up or you are going to walk away. If you followed the Penn State/sex abuse story last week that is a perfect example. Leading does not mean that you don't care about what others think. Rather, it means that you care enough to do what's right and to withstand criticism that might come your way. And that's not an easy thing to do. You want to be liked; you want to be respected. We all do.

But sometimes you have to take a risk. As just one example, if you see someone bullying someone in person or through Facebook, don't just sit back and watch it happen. Say something.

Keep in mind too, that peer pressure does not have to be negative; it can be positive. The responsibility of leadership, I believe, also means working with and inspiring those around you to think outside of the box to get the job done.

Now, I can tell you – there are going to be days when you make mistakes. It happens. I've made plenty of them. So you pick yourself up, learn from it and move forward. Leaders take responsibility for their actions – they don't play the “blame game” or point fingers. This is an important part of being a trusted leader.

Finally, I want to make a pitch to each of you that you seriously consider a career in the legal profession. Here, individuals truly make a difference in our society whether they are legislators, lawyers or judges. There are so many ways a law degree can give you the tools you need to help your community and our nation. As a legislator you can make laws that will make your community a better and safer place to live, as a lawyer you can represent people who need help and have nowhere else to turn, and, finally, as a judge you can strive to make sure that justice is done in all matters that come before you, whether they be criminal, family or business cases. I cannot imagine a more exciting opportunity and I hope that someday some of you will feel the same way.

I hope you have a wonderful morning and that you enjoy the rest of the program. Thank you again for providing me this opportunity to address you.