



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

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### TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

February 29, 2008

Good Morning Senator Handley and Representative Sayers and members of the Committee. I am Jeanne Milstein, the Child Advocate for the state of Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to testify.

I fully support Senate Bill No. 241, An Act Examining The Licensure System For The Department Of Children And Families. This bill would require that the Office of Policy and Management establish a committee to examine and evaluate the existing licensure system for facilities under the jurisdiction of the Department of Children and Families.

I have a suggestion—I don't believe that we need another study. I think that it is time to just transfer the functions now. We have been concerned for quite some time about the inherent conflict of interest that exists when DCF is both the regulator and the consumer. It is really a case of the "fox watching the hen house." While other agencies are responsible for licensing their own facilities, DCF is different in at least one very important way. DCF is the only agency in which the consumers, children, are entitled to services. As a result, they have a desperate need to keep facilities open, even in the face of glaring problems identified by their own staff. This was made clear in our investigation of Haddam Hills. What we learned at Haddam Hills was that even though executive staff were informed of the problems, they "failed to preserve the independence of regulatory oversight and repeatedly failed to exercise good judgment."<sup>1</sup> There is no question that "the blurred, divided responsibilities within DCF clearly operate to the detriment of the best interests of children."<sup>2</sup>

Based on what we learned through our investigation of Haddam Hills, and what we see on an ongoing basis at DCF, I would make two additional recommendations. First, I would recommend that program review functions also be transferred to the Department of Public Health. Again, this would ensure independent program review such that identification and remediation of systemic problems would not be overshadowed by the crisis of the day. Numerous experiences over the last few years were essentially left unattended by DCF and escalated into horrendous conditions. Effective quality assurance, as a critical component of program review, would evaluate on an ongoing basis the quality, efficacy, and effectiveness of services, supporting best practices and intervening to avoid costly and potentially devastating crises. Second, I would recommend that the bill that includes language to require the Department of Public Health to license Riverview Hospital be expanded to include other facilities that are not

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Attorney General and the Child Advocate: Department of Children and Families Oversight of Haddam Hills Academy*, May 30, 2002, p. 117.

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

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currently licensed: Connecticut Juvenile Training School, Connecticut Children's Place, High Meadows, and the Wilderness School. There is no reason that these facilities should not be held to the same exacting standards as any other facility. With these changes, I believe Senate Bill 241 can truly have an impact on the quality of services provided to our most vulnerable children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Attorney General and the Child Advocate: Department of Children and Families Oversight of Haddam Hills Academy*, May 30, 2002, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*