



**Middlesex
Coalition
For
Children**

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**Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections
Committee on Governor's Bill No. 840, in support of
continuing the Commission on Children**

March 16, 2009

Betsy Morgan
Director, Middlesex Coalition for Children
Member, Early Childhood Education Cabinet, representing Senator Thomas Gaffey
30 Gordon Place
Middletown, CT 06457

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Committee:

I am here to testify AGAINST the proposal in the Governor's Bill 840 to eliminate the Commission on Children.

There are a lot of reasons why this is a REALLY BAD idea. Here are three:

- The Commission brings more money to the table than it spends.
- The Commission, more than any other state agency, moves the children's agenda forward. Connecticut desperately needs to do better by its children.
- The Commission is uniquely skilled at bringing the nation's best research to bear on policy development in Connecticut.

I want to focus on a different, equally important, reason for continuing to fund the Commission. It is the service the Commission performs for those of us in towns and cities around the state who are working to improve the lives of children in our communities.

My organization, the Middlesex Coalition for Children, is one of a growing number of local advocacy organizations for children around the state. We exist because too many of our children are in serious trouble. Here are just two facts about children in Middletown:

- a) 1 in 5 (20 %) live in households where there is not always enough nutritious food to eat
- b) 1 in 4 (25%) test at Basic or Below on the CMTs

The conditions in which a quarter of our children are growing up are simply not acceptable. We are working to ensure that our town, our state and our nation do right by them.

At the level of state government, the Commission on Children has been our most important ally – by far. Perhaps because the Commission works for the Legislature, not the Executive, the Commission understands that real change – the internalized, durable change that counts – comes not from state offices but from the public. It comes from constituents, activists, grassroots organizations, local agencies, church groups, service clubs, even passionate

individuals. This kind of participation is not just a tenet of democratic theory; as legislators know, it is the foundation of effective policy and effective government.

The Commission on Children pays as much attention to what is happening in Connecticut's towns and cities as to what is happening at the Capitol. No other agency makes such a point of getting to know – and mentor -- local leaders on children's issues. It has an eagle eye for promising local initiatives – Bridgeport's Child FIRST, for instance – which it brings to the attention of legislators and policy makers. It is the Commission to which local leaders turn to smooth the rough edges of their advocacy, and test their ideas against sophisticated policy analysis.

Children can't speak for themselves, and the children who most need help don't have parents who can hire lobbyists. They need organizations like mine and many others. And we need the Commission. We REALLY need it. If the Commission goes, so will much of the best local work on behalf of struggling children and families.

Please resist the Governor's recommendation. Support the continuance of an agency that is absolutely central to the urgent work of improving the lives of Connecticut's children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.