



**Good Morning, Chairman Slossberg and Representative Spallone and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Domenique Thornton, I am the General Counsel for the Mental Health Association of CT, Inc., (MHAC), a one hundred (100) year old private non-profit dedicated to service, education and advocacy for people with mental health disabilities. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to S.B. 839 An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidations of Various State Agencies that provides for the consolidation the Office of the Child Advocate with the Attorney General's Office. I would also like to oppose H.B. 6375 An Act Concerning Review and Termination of Certain Boards and Commission eliminating the Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. The Mental Health Association of Connecticut, Inc. (MHAC) provides residential services for people who have severe and prolonged mental illness. A majority of the people we serve have had mental health disabilities since birth. Early intervention can reduce some of the ill effects of mental illness. The Office of the Child Advocate adds an important independent voice to protect children. What could be a more important function of state government? The Child Care Advocate must independently investigate state agencies that deal with children and alert the legislature and the public when the agencies are not providing the care that Connecticut expects. They would have a conflict of interest with the Attorney General's Office if the office were to be included within that office because the Attorney General represents the agencies that they must investigate.**

Other people MHAC serves are the Deaf and Hearing Impaired who are frequently also developmentally disabled as well, due to premature birth. The MHAC Robinson House, named after the renowned and beloved teacher of the Deaf, Luther D. Robinson, MD, a pioneer in the development of mental health services, is a 24-hour a day program, a licensed group home. MHAC also sponsors a supervised apartment program. The rehabilitative model is based on a rehabilitative model where staff assists clients in developing and pursuing their individual goals. Rehabilitative services assist clients in learning and performing daily living skills and in creating and enhancing their community networks. But, Robinson House only serves 8 clients. These watchdog agencies within state government that are dedicated to children and the one that supports the Deaf to ensure that they receive the special attention they deserve, the Office of Child Advocate and the Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, should be maintained. These two offices educate, empower and advocate for people who cannot speak for themselves. To eliminate, impair or reduce these offices would be a serious mistake and a bad policy decision for Connecticut. Protection of children and people with disabilities such as the Deaf and Hearing Impaired are important state functions. We cannot depend only on an educated and active citizenry to support these functions. Every other state in the United States and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico recognizes the necessity of a separate commission for the Deaf because their issues are so unique. The state of Connecticut should not abrogate its responsibility to persons who have such special and unique needs. Connecticut has a responsibility to provide the leadership and support for its young and for people with multiple disabilities. It should not relinquish those responsibilities because of a temporary budgetary crisis because its citizenry is educated and compassionate. Connecticut should keep the Office of Child Advocate and the Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired because it is a vital part of the mission of government. Thank you.