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Connecticut General Assembly
Committee on Government Administration and Elections
Legislative Office Building Room 2200
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Governor's **H.B. No. 6375**, Session Year 2009
Specifically item (25) The Commission on Children established under section 46a-126;

Dear Honorable members of Government Administration & Elections Committee:

I am a 30 year resident of Fairfield County Connecticut, and I am writing to express my concern about recent discussion and the pending decision to remove the Commission on Children (COC) and the Parent Trust Fund (PTF) from the State's budget. I'd like to apologize for being unable to appear at the Legislative Office Building to testify personally, but I am busy administering Danbury High School CAPT's. I hope this letter shows as much passion as would my appearance before you.

To quote Mr David Radcliff's letter to appropriations:

“Research shows that parent engagement has a significant and positive impact on child outcomes, particularly in education and health. Both the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund support planning, programs and activities that prepare parents, grandparents, and other adult caregivers to work with school, community and state leaders to improve health, safety and learning outcomes for all children.

The Parent Trust Fund - the first initiative of this kind in the nation - was established through ground-breaking legislation passed by the Connecticut General Assembly in June, 2001. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation seeded the Trust with \$250,000. The William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund followed as the first Connecticut foundation to contribute. Importantly, Graustein continues to offer private matching funds to the State's investment in the Parent Trust. Now with five years of success, the Fund has earned strong bipartisan support from the Governor, the Legislature, and local elected officials.”

The Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund have made an important difference here in Danbury. These resources are vital investments in our state's children and families - especially in these challenging economic times. Danbury has built a community of Parent Leaders making a positive difference for children, families and the education system. As a 2003 graduate of Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) and 2008 graduate of Parents Supporting Excellence in Education (PSEE), for several years, I've given a minimum of 15 volunteer hours per month to

my community. I am active and engaged with schools and community programs. I've served in leadership capacity on many boards and committees including but not limited to:

Vice President, Hayestown Avenue Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
Vice President and President, Western CT Academy for International Studies Elementary Magnet School PTO
President, The Danbury Citywide PTO Council
Secretary, Co-Secretary, and Sunshine Committee Chair, The PLTI Alumni Group
Coordinator, The Greater Danbury Systems of Care Family Focus Partnership
Parent Representative Member, Danbury Public Schools School Safety Violence Prevention and Emergency Preparedness Task Force
Parent Representative Member, Danbury Public Schools Calendar Committee
Parent Representative Member, Hiring Review Board for Early Education and Special Projects position, Danbury Public Schools
DISCOVERY Oversight Committee
Girl Scout Leadership

I've also worked as a coach with Danbury PAL Soccer, and with Danbury's Parents as Partners in Education Committee, The School Readiness Council, and The New 3R's. I've written small grants and been awarded to coordinate Community Conversations. I also believe my engagement and knowledge of my community led to my recent employment by Danbury Public Schools Guidance and ESL/Bilingual Coordinator's offices. I can now work up to being the sole provider for my family as a single mom.

I once asked myself, would I have done all this without my PLTI and PSEE training? NO, I would not. In my opinion about myself, more than likely I would not have participated at all in any of it. I have made great strides in personal development since my PLTI education. My point is, I am just one. We have a growing network of citizens, over 180 people strong just from PLTI, who are learning to understand and engage in government, civics, and the education system. Whether it's me or another parent leader, the programs organized by the Commission on Children and partially funded by the Parent Trust Fund help our community inform, educate and engage our families in the community and work together for positive outcomes. Parent Leaders create programs, improve lifestyles, help people, and create leaders. We need the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund.

Are losing Parent Leaders and their gifts in the community the tradeoffs that we really want to make by cutting the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund from our budget? I am looking forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wolke, Parent Leader

cc: Senator Michael McLachlan
Lauren Halpin, Coordinator Danbury Parent Leadership Training and People Empowering People
Patti Keckeisen, Facilitator, Danbury Parent Leadership Training Institute and National Support for PLTI programs
Linda Kosko, Executive Director, Danbury Children First, Inc.
Anne Mead, Coordinator of Danbury Parents Supporting Excellence in Education and Executive Director, Early Care and Education Training Institute
Eileen Fitzgerald, Danbury Newstimes
Mayor Mark Boughton