

Testimony of Joan O'Brien-Law  
151 Flagler Avenue, Stratford, CT  
Monday March 16, 2009  
Government Administration and Elections Committee

H. B. No. 6375 AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW AND TERMINATION OF CERTAIN BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.

S.B. No. 840 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF THE OFFICE OF CONSUMER COUNSEL, THE OFFICE OF THE HEALTHCARE ADVOCATE, THE OFFICE OF OMBUDSMAN FOR PROPERTY RIGHTS AND CERTAIN LEGISLATIVE COMMISSIONS.

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on very important proposed bills. My name is Joan O'Brien-Law and I am a parent of a young adult with special needs and a Gov. appointed parent member of the Connecticut Family Support Council.

It is very upsetting to learn that H.B. No. 6375 would eliminate the Connecticut Family Support Council as an unnecessary and obsolete entity. The Family Support Council is anything but unnecessary or obsolete. For over 19 years I have navigated the systems of service delivery that provide services and support to families with special needs, it has never been an easy task. Over the years, the Family Support Council has steadily improved the knowledge and understanding among lawmakers of what families raising children with disabilities and complex medical conditions are experiencing. The Council along with its state agency and private provider partners has identified barriers in state systems, the insurance industry and health care services and developed plans for many solutions and suggestions for improvement in service delivery. Often providing recommendations that if fully implemented would maximize state resources. For example, Council members collaborated in pursuing federal grants to establish a coordinated network across the state to provide information, support and education to Connecticut families caring for a child with special health care needs. Today that network, the Family Support Network, employs six coordinators in six regions around our state serving hundreds of families each year as well as supporting and guiding the case work of the Departments of Children and Families, Developmental Services, Public Health and Social Services.

In S.B. No. 840 the Commission on Children would be eliminated. The Commission is an active member of the Family Support Council and has been a very active and dedicated resource for the work we do. The Commission on Children is a one of the most unique entities in the state. Their ability to conduct rapid and thorough research keeps all of Connecticut informed about the circumstances of children and families as well as cutting edge solutions to problems families face. The Commission on Children has provided significant resources on bullying, obesity, violence and health care when those issues were only starting to be recognized for the problems they represent in children's lives. In addition, the Commission on Children has provided counsel and guidance to the Family Support Council in areas that are outside of our most volunteer base, areas of expertise. These would otherwise be unavailable to the Family Support Council. Most importantly, just last week the Commission sponsored an event on President Obama's stimulus package that identified enormous opportunities for funding to the state of Connecticut. I can not imagine what other agency could bring together such a dynamic group of presenters in such a rapid fashion that would allow the state to benefit from the current stimulus package in the most efficient way. I can appreciate that we are in very difficult economic times, but these are the times that children are most at risk, especially children with disabilities or complex medical conditions. Losing the Commission on Children would not represent a savings in the budget. It would represent a loss of a critical resource and a connection to a great many other resources we can not do without at this time. I implore you to preserve the Commission on Children.

Thank you for your time and attention and I ask that you remember this most vulnerable population as you face your deliberations.