

Testimony of Chris Sloss
21 Orchard Rd Milford, 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 your time and interest in hearing from the public about individual experiences and thoughts on the boards and commissions that represent Connecticut residents. I am here today to comment on S. B. no. 840 and H.B no. 6375.

I am a Milford parent of a child who was born with complex medical needs. I am also a member of the Family Support Council, Parents Available to Help, The Milford Youth Network, Co-Facilitator of Family Alliance of Milford and past member of the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities. Though I am writing to represent the Family Support Council, many people that I work and volunteer with share the concerns I present today.

The Family Support Council is a legislatively established partnership of parents and professionals responsible for reviewing services for families raising children with special health care needs. Through collaboration with our agency partners the FSC is guided by the needs of families. We bring awareness to systemic issues and propose guidelines and strategies to improve services. A report is drafted for the governor and general assembly annually concerning the status of CT families and their needs.

The council exists to help those who have gone through life altering experiences. We make sure that the voices and the views of families of children with special health care needs are heard by our state leaders. We promote change in constructive, creative ways through collaborative and dynamic partnerships between state agencies and families.

The Commission on Children and Office of the Healthcare Advocate each play an important role for the families in CT. The Commission on Children's work and extensive research in childhood obesity and bullying has had a strong impact on families raising children with special health care needs. The Office of the Healthcare Advocate is the only option for families who need advice and assistance navigating the health insurance system. Our family was one of them. My husband is employed by the one of largest reinsurance companies in the world, yet it was the office of the Healthcare Advocate who

was able to help us through crucial insurance related roadblocks to get the services we needed for our child and in the end save us all (the insurance company included) an enormous amount of money.

These resources need to remain available for the families in CT. The Commission on Children's ability to conduct rapid and thorough research keeps all of Connecticut informed about the circumstances of children and families in addition to providing cutting edge solutions to the problems families face. They often take the lead on the Family Support Council when discussing cost and no cost options in meeting the needs of Connecticut's children. The Family Support Council and the families our council represent need the support of the Commission on Children and the Office of the Healthcare Advocate to effectively continue its work.

Our work goes way beyond the scope of our monthly meetings. We meet in smaller groups throughout the month discussing ideas to improve things such as in-home and community supports, respite needs, cultural outreach, healthcare and insurance, education, transition services and more. The Family Support Network, an additional arm of the Family Support Council, is a six region network which provides community based assistance and support. They are our direct connection to the people of CT. In each region our coordinators are networking and socializing with families providing training and educational workshops, helping families to advocate for local programs and services, and providing access and referrals to local and statewide resources.

The Family Support Council has been supporting CT families for nearly 15 years. We want to be here as long as families need us. We need your help to keep that commitment! The Family Support Council is a state mandated council which receives NO FUNDING from the state. Eliminating the Council won't help the state's budget problems; rather, in doing so, the legislators would be sending a message to families that their constituents are not a priority.

In summary, I urge you to remove the Family Support Council from H.B no. 6375 and remove The Commission on Children and Office of the Healthcare Advocate from S.B. no 840. I ask that you not to diminish our faith in government by taking away the one collective, collaborative voice we have for the families of CT. This is an opportunity to show CT families that you hear us!

Thank you.