

Testimony for public hearing on the governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman" (as appropriate) "and members of the committee:

Thank you for taking the time to hear my remarks today.

I am Alison Mundy, Director of Development for the Children's Law Center. Our organization provides legal representation and family mediation services to children living in poverty. These are children who are caught up in difficult, protracted cases involving divorce, custody and visitation. Our cases are often exacerbated by mental illness, substance abuse, incarceration or domestic violence. They always involve children who would otherwise have no voice, and no representation of their best interests. We serve five court jurisdictions throughout the state of CT, and receive a large portion of our funding from the Children's Trust Fund.

The Children's Law Center was founded in 1993 when a young girl in northeastern Connecticut was murdered by her own father during a supervised visitation. From there, we have grown to serve nearly 3,000 children through our combined programs in 2009. The funding we receive from the Children's Trust Fund is crucial to our operating budget. As presented, the governor's deficit mitigation plan would effectively eliminate \$75,000 of funding for the Children's Law Center - a cut that would be difficult, if not impossible to cover.

By removing the burden of our cases from the court system and resolving them expediently, the Children's Law Center actually saves the state money, and time. It is our goal, in serving the best interest of our young clients, to craft agreements in their favor and settle out of court wherever possible. Our family mediation program, often a last resort for parents before court intervention, helps families reach agreements without tying up the state court system with lengthy custody battles. Over 75% of callers to our free Law Line are referred by the courts, DCF, or the 2-1-1 help line. Additionally, our programs are unique in the state of Connecticut. We operate at full capacity and often have to decline cases that are in dire need of our attention. The funding cuts that are being proposed in this plan will require us to curtail our programs, resulting in more of the state's most vulnerable citizens, *poor children*, being without a voice.