

My name is Susan Zimmerman and I live in the Town of Sprague. I come before you today on behalf of children and their families in Connecticut as I have many times in the past. My concern is that the very citizens that the state is meant to protect are getting lost in the effort to balance the state budget. I am reminded of an interview that our Governor gave shortly after coming to office where she compared the state budget to her family budget. Her solution when funds were short was to stop buying cans of coke. It is true that enough cans of coke will eventually add up to a significant savings. But this assumes the cans of coke have no impact beyond the drinking.

Among the Governor's proposed mid-year budget reductions are three agencies that I believe have a significant impact on children and their families and should not have their funding reduced or eliminated:

Commission on Children: Just last month I attended the CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE) annual conference and very much enjoyed a breakout session on increasing student achievement by improving parent involvement. An effective tool has been Parents SEE (Parents Supporting Educational Excellence), in part the work of the Commission on Children. This work and the benefits to statewide education would be lost if the Commission were eliminated.

Office of the Child Advocate: Just as one example of the important work undertaken by OCA is the issue of young adults with mental health issues transitioning from the children's system to the adult system. This work is ongoing and it cannot be done with just a few less staff.

Independent Living Centers: As a Board member of Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, one of the five Independent Living Centers in CT, I see the work that gets done daily to connect children and adults with disabilities to resources that help them live independently. This is work that no one else is doing and again it can't be done with just a few less staff because there is already too few staff to do the work that needs to be done.

I understand that the General Assembly needs to find a way to balance our budget. And tough decisions have to be made. As you do this work, I would like you to ask yourself the following: Does it really make that much difference to the budget to save a few dollars on eliminating the Commission on Children, cutting the Office of the Child Advocate by 50%, and reducing funding to the Independent Living Centers? Aren't there cans of coke that can go undrunk with less impact on the most vulnerable populations in CT?

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