TESTIMONY AGAINST BILL H.B. NO. 6365 TO ELIMINATE THE CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND

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I am Joanna Bogin, program manager for the ***Help Me Grow*** National Replication Project at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center. I am testifying today against Bill Number 6365 and in support of continuation of the Children's Trust Fund and its crucial role in supporting children's healthy development and primary prevention.

Today I want to highlight one program of the Children's Trust Fund, ***Help Me Grow***. I was the program manager for ***Help Me Grow*** until last April when I left the Trust Fund to work as the program manager for the ***Help Me Grow*** National Replication Project, at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center. My current project is being funded by the Commonwealth Fund; this project is replicating ***Help Me Grow*** in five states.

Help Me Grow has received national attention because it is a cost effective program that helps connect families to **existing** services and supports. The three components of the program are a single point of access call center (CDI), where families and/or professionals can call to receive assistance in any area of their child's development, community outreach to service providers, and training of child health providers in the early detection of children with developmental and behavioral problems.

The current funding recommendation cuts the ***Help Me Grow*** budget from $650,000 to $300,000, which would eliminate two critical components, community outreach and physician training. It also recommends moving the funding for the remaining component, the Child Development Infoline call center, to the Department of Children and Family.

Let me address each of these issues in turn. Regarding the funding reduction: ***Help Me Grow*** is a safety net for thousands of families in the state. Our research has shown that it can take seven (and even) more calls for a care coordinator to find even one service for a family. The ***Help Me Grow*** community liaisons are the "on the ground" legs that find what is available for families and their children. They serve as a "living resource directory" making sure they are current on the most recent changes in services and knowing how to access these services. Without this critical component families will not get connected to much needed supports and services, therefore leaving some services under utilized and missing the opportunity to intervene while children are still young. When interventions do not take place in early childhood more costly interventions are necessary when they are older. We cannot afford for that to happen during these difficult times.

Pediatric training and outreach is another critical component that would be cut. Currently, the *Help Me Grow* community liaisons provide the trainings and visit the offices of pediatricians and family practitioners throughout the state. Without these trainings fewer children with developmental delays or other non-medical problems will be identified at a young age. Our research demonstrates that when child health providers received training about ***Help Me Grow*** it doubled the number of children identified. Without this component children who are at-risk for behavioral and developmental problems might not be identified until they enter elementary school, far too late to provide the most effective (and cost effective) remediation.

The second issue is the transfer to the remains of ***Help Me Grow*** to the Department of Children and Families:

Transferring the Children's Trust Fund programs to the Department of Children and Families will have a negative impact on the ***Help Me Grow*** program due to the parent's fear of engagement with the agency responsible for child protective services. In fact, when ***Help Me Grow*** began, we had to work to reassure families that there was not a connection. The Children's Trust Fund has effectively operated and created the infrastructure for the ***Help Me Grow*** and has been critical to the oversight and administration of the *Help Me Grow* program. The agency is uniquely positioned to focus on prevention and care coordination. This is very different from DCF. Their primary focus is intervening in reported cases of abuse and neglect.

So today I am asking you to support two essential changes:

First, do not cut the "legs" off the ***Help Me Grow*** program. Fully *fund Help Me Grow* program for $650,000 and secondly, keep this nationally recognized program at the Children's Trust Fund where it will continue to provide exemplary administrative support and oversight.

During these difficult times we need to support children and families, please don't take away their safety net.