TESTIMONY AGAINST BILL H.B. No 6365 TO ELIMINATE THE CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND
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I am Dr. Paul Dworkin. I am Chair of the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and Physician in Chief of Connecticut Children's Medical Center. I am testifying today against bill **HB number 6365** and in support of continuation of the Children's Trust Fund and its critically important programs that support young children's healthy development. In particular, I wish to emphasize the benefits of one such program, ***Help Me Grow***, and the impact of eliminating critical components of this nationally-renowned program.

Help Me Grow, a program of the Children's Trust Fund, has been funded by the State of Connecticut as a key prevention program since 2002. Thanks to the Children's Trust Fund's effective and efficient management and unprecedented collaboration across five state agencies, the program serves thousands of children and their families each year and only costs the State approximately $650,000. The key components of ***Help Me Grow*** include training the State's child health providers in the early detection of children with developmental and behavioral problems, maintaining a resource inventory of programs and services in support of young children's healthy development, creating a single point of entry for such programs and services-Child Development Infoline, operated by United Way/211, and collecting data that identifies critical capacity issues and gaps in services to inform planning and program development.

The success of ***Help Me Grow*** in connecting children and their families to community-based programs and services has been well documented through annual evaluations conducted by the Center for Social Research of the University of Hartford and annual reports by the Children's Trust Fund in results-based accountability format. The effectiveness and efficiencies of this program have received widespread attention and placed Connecticut in a national leadership role. In fact, ***Help Me Grow*** has already been replicated in Orange County, California and Polk County, Iowa. Thanks to a grant to Connecticut Children's Medical Center from the prestigious Commonwealth Fund of New York, ***Help Me Grow*** is now being replicated in five other states, including South Carolina, Oregon, and Massachusetts. At the federal level, support for national replication of Connecticut's ***Help Me Grow*** has been discussed on the floor of the Senate by Senator Dodd as a quality component of health care reform, and the Senator has requested that I discuss the program at an upcoming town fair during his "Prescriptions for Change" health care listening tour around the state. The irony of national replication occurring in concert with our State's proposed elimination of critical program components is disheartening, at best.

Moving the programs of the Children's Trust Fund to the Department of Children and Families will have a sobering impact on the budget and effectiveness of **Help Me Grow**. While United Way/211 will continue to operate Child Development Infoline, critical components of the ***Help Me Grow*** program, including the regional child development liaisons responsible for maintaining the resource inventory, supporting the linkage of children and families to programs and services, and educating child health providers and their practices about Help Me Grow, will be eliminated. Furthermore, transfer of this prevention program to the Department of Children and Families will likely deter families from reaching out to the program for help, due to fear of engagement with the agency responsible for child protection. Indeed, parents often express initial reluctance to engage with **Help Me Grow** without reassurance that this is a prevention, not child protection, program.

The Children's Trust Fund has nurtured and effectively operated **Help Me Grow** in support of the healthy development of Connecticut's youngest children. This program is both clinically- and cost-effective. Connecticut's support of this program has brought national recognition and encouraged replication efforts in other states. Please acknowledge the importance and success of this program by continuing to support its critical components and enabling ongoing management by the Children's Trust Fund.