

To: Senate Co-Chair Edith Prague
House Co-Chair Gail Hamm
House Co-Chair Peter Villano
Senate Ranking Member Rob Kane
House Ranking Member Jason Perillo
Honorable Members of the Human Services Sub-Committee

From: Frank J. Forgione, Administrative Judge
New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court

Re: The Council to Administer the Children's Trust Fund

Date: February 18, 2009

I am testifying today to support the Children's Trust Fund and its continuance as a stand alone agency. While it is evident that the state is facing a dire financial crisis, the services provided for by the Children's Trust Fund save the state millions of dollars and is an example of how preventative services pay dividends in the long term. More importantly, the services they provide enable children and families to remain together and receive the assistance they need to ensure their development and safety.

The probate court system has been involved with the Children's Trust Fund for years. As our caseload shifts away from estate work and toward cases that require social services, the benefits and expertise they provide us is becoming more essential. Specifically the Kinship Fund and the Grandparent Respite Fund have been instrumental in helping our family guardians get aid where none had existed in the past.

The Kinship Fund provides grants of \$500 per child, up to \$2,000 per family. Grants are intended to help children and their legal guardian appointed in probate court or appointed in Juvenile Court and not receiving a subsidy from the Department of Children and Families adjust to new circumstances. Funds can be used to improve children's health, which includes paying for eyeglasses, dental care and hearing care; and to enrich children's lives by paying for such things as school trips, clubs, sports, educational classes, art supplies and materials, clothes, school uniforms, photographs and other memorabilia for important school functions, lessons such as karate and driver education courses, summer camps, vacations and vocational or trade school supplies.

The Respite Fund provides grants up to \$2,000 for families in which a grandparent or other adult has been appointed as a guardian for relative children

by the probate court or appointed in Juvenile Court and is not receiving a subsidy from the Department of Children and Families. The intended purpose of the grant is to benefit the relative caregiver and ultimately the child. Funds may be used for: housing expenses, including shelter, furnishings, utilities and food; transportation expenses including the purchase of a car, insurance, gasoline, maintenance costs and public transportation; child care and other expenses such as day care tuition and supplies, baby-sitting, entertainment and personal care items.

Kinship and Respite Fund grants are distributed through the Office of the Probate Court Administrator to select probate courts in the state. Grants are based upon available funding, are available once per calendar year, and at the discretion of the presiding or Administrative Judge.

While these grants may not seem significant, they are invaluable to struggling families who make great sacrifices so the children they love don't enter the child welfare system of the state, where the financial burden on the taxpayers will be much greater.

The Children's Trust Fund has not only administered these funds professionally, but they have provided other services to our courts and families. They conduct seminars, trainings, and provide community outreach to connect families with local service providers.

When meeting with families it becomes clear how important these funds and services are in keeping children with their families and in the community. The Children's Trust Fund has helped minimize the stress on these children in need, and the families that care for them. The seemingly modest assistance they provide goes a long way toward altering the course of children's lives toward a healthier and more prosperous future.