



**Commission On Child Protection**  
*State of Connecticut*

*Office of the Chief Child Protection Attorney*

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Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli  
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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
Public Hearing February 18, 2009

H. B. No. 6365 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2011, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THERE FOR.

I would like to thank the Chairs and distinguished committee members for this opportunity to be heard regarding H.B. No. 6365 and specifically regarding the Governor's proposal to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund.

As the head of an agency responsible for providing legal representation to children experiencing the aftermath of neglect and abuse and as Acting Chair of the Children's Trust Fund, I believe that placing the programs of the Children's Trust Fund in DCF's hands would be a grave mistake. At a time when the policy makers of this state are struggling with balancing the needs of vulnerable citizens against the perils of government intrusion and the reality of limited resources, the Children's Trust Fund is poised to make a valuable contribution towards achieving that balance.

"Prevention" efforts are the most responsible and cost-effective methods to reduce child neglect and abuse and all its attendant short and long-term costs to our children, families, communities and state. Responsible because the state is proactive in helping parents be better parents and children avoid the pain of abuse and neglect; cost-effective because of the exponential expense of childhood abuse and neglect in our society.

The Children's Trust Fund is the state agency whose sole responsibility is to prevent child abuse and neglect. Its methods are focused on enhancing the capacity of community providers and families to take responsibility for child welfare; its programs empower parents to improve their own lives through their timely, voluntary and supportive approach; and they have proved successful in reducing the incidents of child maltreatment by parents at high risk for such behavior. The Children's Trust Fund from very early on embraced results based accountability to ensure that its programs worked and that state dollars are spent on evidence based practices. As a result, the Nurturing Family Network and the Children's Trust Fund are trusted resources in our communities.

The Children's Trust Fund should not be eliminated; it should be emulated and expanded to bring its vision, mission and methods to as many at risk families as possible. That would be cost-effective and responsible. It is not cost-effective to save \$1.5 million dollars in personnel costs, only to have \$16 million dollars in program costs go under-utilized because a program associated with DCF will not be perceived as voluntary, empowering or helpful – all critical components to the success of Children's Trust Fund programs.

With all of DCF's current challenges and its primary mission to address the needs of children who have been abused, neglected, found delinquent or facing mental health and behavioral issues, it really does not make sense to ask them to administer these contracts and provide the training and quality assurance for programs that the Children's Trust Fund helped create, study, and perfect.

It would be much more logical to have the state agency that was specifically created by the legislature to prevent neglect or abuse from ever occurring in the first place to identify, in collaboration with other state agencies, all the prevention programs

that currently exist and determine if a more coordinated, comprehensive, logical and cost-effective primary prevention system can be achieved.

The Children's Trust Fund would make this a priority and examine all current efforts at prevention, identify which programs work, and ensure a method of implementation that supports community providers and empowers families. In this way, the state can cost effectively achieve a balance whereby government support enables communities and families to raise healthier, happier children. This in turn will ultimately render them less dependent upon state assistance and less subject to more intrusive governmental interventions from DCF, law enforcement, courts and corrections.

I therefore respectfully request that this Committee recommend to the General Assembly that the Children's Trust Fund be permitted to continue its work preventing child abuse and neglect in the State of Connecticut.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Signorelli