

Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut, Inc.

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A Non-Profit Agency Serving Families of Children with Disabilities Since 1962

Public Testimony in Support of the Commission on Children

My name is Diane Willcutts, and I am a parent from West Hartford and a member of the Board of the Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut (LDA-CT).

LDA-CT strongly supports the Commission on Children, and we disagree that it is mere "luxury" to provide a legislative voice for children.

During her budget address, the Governor mistakenly asserts that the Commission and other agencies targeted for elimination merely "serve worthy purposes on paper, but all have functions largely duplicated by regular state agencies."

The Governor and others have inaccurately stated that the Department of Children and Families fulfills the same role as the Commission on Children, even though the day-to-day work that DCF does is clearly very different from the day-to-day work performed by the Commission. Are Connecticut voters expected to believe that any state agency with the word "children" in the name performs the same function?

The not-so-subtle attacks on the Commission on Children and the other relatively tiny agencies that speak for our neediest citizens have come not only from the governor but also from Republican and Democratic legislators. Some have even proposed merging all the Commissions into one amalgamated Human Rights agency, but this makes little sense, given the diversity of the populations served.

A Courant article that was printed on 1/7/2009—before the Governor's address—continues to haunt me, as it quoted the Senate Communications Director, who said, "The commissions have done a great job advocating for people who have been traditionally disenfranchised. . . .But this is going to be a session of having to say no to your friends."

This one statement illustrates the problem with our state's decision-making, as even now it is driven by political friendships rather than the needs of communities, which include struggling single moms, minorities who are *still* denied equal access to education, and children whose welfare is often supplanted by corporate interests and adult egos. Our legislative commissions provide a voice—sometimes the only voice—for those in need.

We applaud the state's plan to slim down our \$18-billion budget. But that is no excuse for further disenfranchising the disenfranchised. The Commission on Children is a cost-effective investment in our state's future.

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