

**Testimony of Haskins Literacy Initiative to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut
Legislature concerning the Commission on Children**

February 18, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. As the director of Haskins Literacy Initiative, the teacher-training applied research arm of Haskins Laboratories, I respectfully urge you to maintain funding for the Commission on Children. Since 2000, we at Haskins, CT teachers whom we've trained, and the children whom these teachers have taught, have been the benefactors of the Commission's vision, policy acumen, and dedication to raising the achievement of every child in our state.

Specifically, the Commission helped bring to light that for many years running, only 4 out of 10 CT fourth graders score at grade level and that our state's achievement gap is one of the largest nationwide. Over the past decade, the Commission has kept reading in the forefront in many ways – through the Early Reading Success Legislation, by spearheading the Connecticut Early Reading Success Panel that produced Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement, by promoting school readiness and by fighting to preserve Early Reading Success funding.

In fact, it was the Commission who persuaded Haskins Laboratories to share scientific research and to develop a model to bring comprehensive, research-based reading instruction into schools. It was the Commission who introduced legislation to require early childhood and elementary school teachers to pass a reading instruction test in order to become certified. The legislation failed, but the Commission did not as Commissioner of Education Mark McQuillan implemented such a policy effective July 1 of this year.

The Commission has also been instrumental in assisting parents in learning how to lead for their children. The Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Education Excellence are the most well-organized, high-quality efforts at engaging parents in community involvement on behalf of their children that I have EVER seen in my 36 years as a professional educator. These programs are critical in building the necessary infrastructure to ensure that children have what they need to be successful in life – hinging on a necessary home-school-community collaboration.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Commission has been accountable to the state of Connecticut and our children. Now it is time for the state to remain accountable to our children, by standing by the Commission. If they can't speak for our children, who will?

Thank you for listening and respectfully submitted,

Margie Gillis, Senior Scientist and Project Director, gillis@haskins.yale.edu
Haskins Literacy Initiative at Haskins Laboratories, New Haven, CT www.haskins.yale.edu