

## COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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### TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY ELISABETH BORRINO REGARDING THE COMMISSION ON CHILD PROTECTION

Connecticut's children who have already been subjected to either abuse or neglect at the instance of their parents and guardians, require an Attorney to protect them and advocate for them as they navigate through the web of the system of child protection. In order to have that protection and advocacy, the Attorney needs to be well-trained, independent, and have support. Since the creation of the Commission on Child Protection as implemented by the Chief Child Protection Attorney ("CCPA"), the protection and advocacy of these children has improved and continues to improve.

As a Child Protection Attorney for years, both prior to and after the creation of the CCPA, I can attest that the training and support received has significantly improved the system. These improvements include, but are certainly not limited to:

1. Ongoing training and education, including conferences, continuing legal education, and email notification of important changes and proposals as regards the courts and the law;
2. Availability of the CCPA, and her staff, to review and critique legal briefs and arguments, which is very important since the majority of the contract attorneys are sole practitioners who are afforded little opportunity for this peer review;
3. Ability to contact the CCPA - seemingly twenty-four hours a day - and have impressively prompt responses to important issues that arise, including simple collaboration, advice, and recommendations regarding actual pending cases;
4. Intervention by the CCPA with DCF and establishment of communication systems to ensure that Attorneys have access to their clients as well as notification of important meetings at DCF regarding such cases;
5. Providing individual copies of important books and online publication of legal resources and information for easy and quick reference, at no cost to the Attorney;

6. Advising Attorneys of training opportunities and educational materials that otherwise may not have been available or known;
7. Establishing a "mentoring" system whereby the experienced Attorneys would "mentor" new Attorneys;
8. Paying the membership fee for Attorneys to be part of the National Association of Counsel for Children ("NACC") - a National Organization - which also provides educational information, training, and certification for Child Welfare Law Specialization;
9. Advising and encouraging Attorneys to become Child Welfare Law Specialists by, among other things, providing financial support and incentive;
10. Unparalleled support, assistance, and compassion to Attorneys who just need to "vent" and "brainstorm" when dealing with the types of cases that most people don't want to hear about and would like to believe do not exist.

Child Protection Attorneys are still not receiving financial compensation comparable to that of other practitioners. In the past, they had to balance the lower financial compensation with the cost of training and publications. That is no longer the case. The Attorneys actively participate in the trainings and services provided by CCPA. At every training, the room is filled to capacity. A significant number of Attorneys, including myself, successfully applied and are scheduled to take the NACC examination next month in order to be Certified Child Welfare Law Specialists.

Connecticut's children have no voice without effective and zealous representation. These children are in the system because they have been subjected to unspeakable trauma, in many instances. When they are teenagers, foster parents do not tolerate the behavior that biological parents do, and they often disrupt such placements and languish for months and years in residential treatment and group homes - in Connecticut and out of state - including mental health facilities simply because opportunities were lost along the way. The instance of foster children languishing in mental health facilities - many as young as nine years old - is alarming. These children grow up and become society's burden. Effective intervention and representation makes a difference.

I am very proud of the work I have done, which includes forever changing the lives of many children, and the work I hope to continue to do.

Having well-trained, highly-qualified and dedicated Attorneys who feel supported, educated, prepared, and appreciated to represent Connecticut's children is imperative.

My own personal experience is that the CCPA provides all of this support thereby

enabling Attorneys like me to continue and new ones to begin.

Respectfully Submitted,

Attorney Elisabeth Borrino.