

Written Testimony of Lisa Sheppard, Fairfield, CT  
Wednesday, December 09, 2009  
Before the  
The Appropriations Committee – Public Hearing  
Commenting on:

## THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED DEFICIT MITIGATION PLAN AND THE IMPACT OF THE GOVERNOR'S RESCISSIONS

Good morning, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today on some very important proposed reductions & eliminations to the State Budget. My name is Lisa Sheppard and I represent the Connecticut Family Support Network and I am an appointed member of the CT Family Support Council, my term expires in 2013. I help & work with families who have children w/ Special Health Care Needs in Fairfield County. I am also the parent of a child with a special health care needs. His name is Blake, and he is 12 years old and he has life threatening conditions, autism and seizures. He is my hero and why I do the work that I do today.

As many of you are well aware, The Council has become a major state resource to state lawmakers, families and many state agencies that are otherwise at a loss to determine how best to support families. Since its inception it is the only state entity with every agency at the table and it is completely non-funded and bipartisan. The CT Family Support Council has steadily improved the knowledge and understanding among lawmakers of what families raising children with disabilities and complex medical conditions are experiencing. We have identified shortcomings in state systems, the insurance industry and health care services. We have also developed dynamic remedies for many of those solutions.

It has come to my attention that the Commission on Children would be eliminated in the Governor's Mitigation Plan. The Commission is intricate and a supportive member of the Family Support Council and has been a very active and dedicated resource for the work we do. There is no other resource like the Commission on Children in the state. Their ability to conduct rapid and thorough research keeps all of Connecticut informed about the circumstances of children and families as well as cutting edge solutions to problems families face. They are a revenue generating resource to the entire state bringing in roughly \$20 million federal dollars to towns across the state, with not one penny going to them. The Commission on Children has provided significant resources on bullying, obesity, violence and health care when those issues were only starting to be recognized for the problems they represent in children's lives. Losing the Commission on Children would not represent a savings in the budget. It would represent a loss of a critical resource and a connection to a great many other resources we cannot do without at this time. I urge you to preserve the Commission on Children.

Next I would like to turn your attention to the proposal to eliminate the Offices of the Child Advocate budget by 50%. The OCA has been dedicated partners with the Family Support Council. In addition to the work they have done for individual families in need of assistance, like the Commission on Children their staff have been remarkably helpful to our members in carrying out our mission. They provide up-to-date information about state and federal policy and help us tremendously translating information directly to families. It is crucial that this agency remain viable and most importantly independent to ensure their ability to maintain objectivity and freedom to examine complaints when children are not served, as they should be. Furthermore, these two agencies do their work with a great deal of expertise, not only in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice and health care and but also in the laws, ethics and standards that drive those fields and in the investigational techniques required to get fair and accurate accounting of the

facts. Children with disabilities or complex medical conditions are at great risk for neglect from caregivers and public systems. Most people intend to be helpful but we find over and over again that they either just do not understand children with special health care needs or they are at a loss themselves for lack of resources to offer. Subsequently, families find themselves in dire circumstances and only the independent Advocates have the access and authority to bring people together to work out solutions. I urge you to preserve the Office of the Child Advocate and the Commission on Children.

For the families I work with including my own little guy it takes a team approach to solving the complicated issues that families face on a day-to-day basis. So any reductions in support dollars and systems of care would affect them detrimentally. Which is why it is so important to keep intact these agencies and commissions. I would urge you to come and meet with the Family Support Council and use these very knowledgeable and talented people to keep you informed on the challenges that your families are going through and ask the questions you need to get answers to before you have to make these hard decisions in the upcoming weeks. In this very challenging time you need to know that when a family gets the devastating diagnosis of a life long disability for their child they go into a financial recession the likes that you have never seen. What we are facing in today's economy is a way of life for families with children who have medical needs...there is no stimulus package for them. When my son was diagnosed I lost my entire life savings caring for his needs and our lives changed forever. I rely on the various agencies, committees and councils to help me navigate Connecticut's very complicated systems. And, I utilize each in turn to help parents work together for the benefit of their children. And, I choose to work & serve in this field because I didn't want new families who have children with disabilities to go through what I did. But, I write you today so that you can help the families in CT get through this crisis.

I thank you for your time and attention. I certainly appreciate the grave challenge before you now and in the New Year ahead, but I promise you that the Commission on Children, and the Office of the Child Advocate are agencies that cost the state little and represent significant resources and even savings for the state of Connecticut.