



Jeanne Milstein
Child Advocate

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
999 ASYLUM AVENUE, HARTFORD, CT 06105

TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 23, 2009

Good Morning Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Jeanne Milstein and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to testify regarding:

- **H.B. No. 6494, An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence; and**
- **H.B. No. 6496, An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools**

I support **HB 6494, An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education** because it would help prevent teen dating violence by requiring schools to implement a curriculum regarding teen dating violence. According to the 2005 Youth Behavior Component of the Connecticut Health Survey, the Department of Public Health found 16% of high school students across the state reported being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the past twelve months (Connecticut School Health Survey, 2005). In Fairfield County alone, 26% of high school students surveyed reported physical abuse by their partner in the last twelve months (Center for Youth Leadership, 2006). Connecticut's statistics are particularly alarming considering the national average of high school students reporting being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend during that time was 9.2% (Connecticut School Health Survey, 2005).

In 2006, at the request of Governor Rell, my office led an initiative around teen dating violence prevention with the help of a dedicated resource group that included experts, advocates, providers and educators from around the state. The focus of the movement was to engage schools in participating in events during a national awareness week. You may remember that in February 2006, we held a summit on Teen Dating Violence. About 300 youth attended. The turnout alone demonstrated that youth recognize this as a very serious issue. Those of you had the opportunity to attend will remember the

emotional stories told by the youth. So many youth spoke of abuse suffered by themselves and their friends. This is a real issue affecting the youth of our state.

The consequences of allowing teen dating violence to continue and perpetuate are severe. Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious lifelong ramifications for both victims and perpetrators. Many will continue to be abused and to abuse as adults. Victims are at a high risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, and even suicide. That is why it is so important to educate youth about dating violence. I understand the bill may have fiscal impact on schools across the state and that the legislature may not be able to move forward on the bill as written. I would, however, urge you to consider legislation that would encourage development and implementation of curricula on teen dating violence prevention.

I support of H.B. No. 6496, which would require schools to use green-cleaning products. Twenty-five percent of cleaning chemicals used in schools are toxic and can significantly contribute to indoor air pollution. These hazardous chemicals contain neurotoxins, carcinogens, reproductive toxins and asthmagens that put the health and safety of Connecticut's children, teachers, staff and custodians at risk.

Eighty-six thousand (86,000) or 10.5% of Connecticut's school children have asthma. Teachers, teachers' aides, and custodians have been found to have higher rates of occupational asthma than the general workforce. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has determined that 12% of work-related asthma can be attributed to exposure to a cleaning product.

This bill requires the phase-in of safer, less toxic cleaning chemicals and that best cleaning management practices be used in all of Connecticut's public schools. Children are legally required to attend school and make up the majority of school occupants. They are by virtue of their size and developing organ systems more vulnerable to toxic exposures. Children cannot identify or remove themselves from environmental health hazards in a school or send in a substitute when they are sickened by indoor air pollution.

Thankfully, there are now hundreds of safe, affordable and effective cleaning products available at little or no additional cost. It is my understanding that this bill is a cost neutral bill and I would encourage the committee to move the bill forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.