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Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee  
March 16, 2009

Senator Slossberg and Representative Spallone, members of the Committee:

I submit this testimony in opposition to sections 19 – 24 of S.B. 839 AN ACT  
CONCERNING MERGERS AND CONSOLIDATIONS OF VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES

I am a member of the Child Fatality Review Panel. I was appointed by the Minority Leader of the House in December 2005. I have very impressed with the professionalism and effectiveness of the panel. We meet monthly to review the death of every child under the age of 18; determine whether the death could have been prevented, and recommend action to prevent similar deaths in the future. I am told that last year we reviewed 532 deaths.

There is no direct cost to the State for the panel. We all receive no compensation or reimbursement for our time or expenses. We continue to serve because we believe our work is important. There are indirect costs associated with the panel and also corresponding savings. The largest indirect cost is the staff of the Office of the Child Advocate that researches the cases for possible connection to the State's child protection services and reports the findings to the panel.

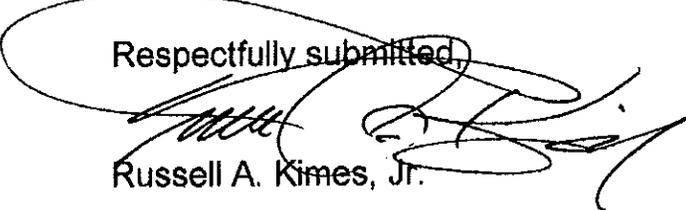
Occasionally there are aspects of the facts surrounding a death that indicate a follow up is appropriate and the Child Advocate's staff conducts an investigation that can result in a formal report and recommendations to prevent future deaths through administrative changes or legislation.

The Governor's proposal to close the Office of the Child Advocate, abolish her staff, and remove her authority to review other state agencies is the best proof that the Office of the Child Advocate has been extremely successful and the agencies effected don't want to be corrected when they make a mistake.

Why else would the Governor want to render the Office powerless when the Child Advocate claims to have achieved a direct cost savings of \$600,000 on one DCF initiative alone earlier this year or the indirect cost saving the Office claims on various institutions and programs? It makes no sense to spend billions on child protection programs and have no agency oversight.

I urge you to delete the provisions of Sections 19 through 24 [lines 636 through 869] of SB 839 dealing with the office of the Child Advocate.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Russell A. Kimes, Jr.