

Testimony of Jennifer Carroll  
Monday March 16, 2009  
Before the  
Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Commenting on:

H. B. No. 6375 AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW AND TERMINATION OF CERTAIN BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.

S. B. No. 839 AN ACT CONCERNING MERGERS AND CONSOLIDATIONS OF VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES.

S. B. No. 840 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF THE OFFICE OF CONSUMER COUNSEL, THE OFFICE OF THE HEALTHCARE ADVOCATE, THE OFFICE OF OMBUDSMAN FOR PROPERTY RIGHTS AND CERTAIN LEGISLATIVE COMMISSIONS

Good morning, Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony today. My name is Jennifer Carroll. I am a parent of a child with multiple disabilities and the Statewide Coordinator of the Connecticut Family Support Network.

**H.B. No. 6375** would eliminate the **Connecticut Family Support Council (CTFSC)** as an unnecessary and obsolete entity. Over the past 15 years the CTFSC has successfully advocated for families raising children with disabilities and special health care needs. The council members are families, family advocates and state agency representatives – all working collaboratively to improve access to and quality of policy and programs that serve these families. 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. The 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. The CTFSC also created the Connecticut Family Support Network (CTFSN), which provides direct 1:1 support to families in the regions and communities where they live. The CTFSN hosts workshops and training for families, provides parent support groups across the state, shares information to hundreds of families weekly via email listserves and works directly with families on important issues including special education, healthcare financing, community involvement, summer activities and development critical advocacy skills.

**The work of the CTFSC is unparalleled in Connecticut and *IT IS FREE!*** There is no cost to the state of Connecticut for the work of this council. ***Every member is a volunteer.*** I urge you to pull the CTFSC out of H.B. No. 6375 and allow the council to continue the crucial work providing a magnitude of difference for families.

Also in H.B. No. 6375 the **Commission on Children** would be eliminated. The Commission is a 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. 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. Just last week the Commission sponsored an event on President Obama's stimulus package that identified enormous opportunities for funding to the state of Connecticut. I do appreciate that we are in very difficult economic times, but these are the times that children are most at risk, especially children with disabilities or complex medical conditions. **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 can not do without at this time. **I urge you to preserve the Commission on Children.**

Next I would like to turn your attention to **S. B. No. 839 and S. B. No. 840**, specifically in the proposal to eliminate the Offices of the Child Advocate and the Health Care Advocate. Both of those agencies have 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. The Family Support Network regional coordinators are reporting record numbers of calls for assistance in dealing with health insurance claims or unresponsive state services. At the March meeting of the Family Support Council I expressed the fear that if the Health Care Advocate or Child Advocate were to be eliminated, I would not have anyone to call to help families with their challenging issues in financing their children's healthcare and related ability to access appropriate programs. It is crucial that these agencies remain viable and 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, healthcare providers 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. **I urge you to preserve the Office of the Child Advocate and the Health Care Advocate.**

Thank you for your attention to these crucial issues. I appreciate the challenges that legislators are facing this year, but I promise you that the Family Support Council, the Commission on Children, the Office of the Child Advocate and the Office of the Health Care Advocate are all agencies that cost the state little or nothing at all, and represent significant resources and even savings for the state of Connecticut.