

TESTIMONY OF SUE A. COUSINEAU
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 6, 2009

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sue A. Cousineau. I am an attorney with a solo practice specializing in child protection matters and guardian ad litem representation of children in family matters. I am here today to speak in opposition of sections 19 and 20 of SB 839 which propose to eliminate the independent oversight of state funded services to children by the Office of the Child Advocate (hereinafter "OCA"). While I am a member of the Advisory Board of OCA, my testimony today is personal.

I watched, with interest, the Joint Legislative Investigative Hearings on the Department of Children and Families (hereinafter "DCF"). The preponderance of the testimony reinforced the widely held notion that, DCF, with its enormous, nine million dollar budget, is broken. I have experienced the short comings of DCF first hand through my many years of representing children and families involved with DCF. The need for a sufficiently staffed, independent agency to oversee DCF is critical, now more than ever.

The OCA is uniquely situated under the current statutory provisions to investigate and evaluate the agencies providing services to our neediest citizens and to bring ineffective and/or harmful practices to the attention of the State and the public. The OCA aids individual children caught up in the system and intervenes to expose and correct systemic problems that benefit all children and families in Connecticut.

We have all seen the effects of lack of oversight in the financial sector. Gutting the OCA is pennywise and pound foolish. The money required to fully fund the OCA is a small price to pay for independent and professional oversight of the troubled DCF and may ultimately save the State money by improving services to the State's children.