

Select Committee on Children	<u>Proposed S.B. No. 174</u>	Opposed
PUBLIC HEARING	<u>Proposed H.B. No. 5145</u>	In Favor
Thursday, February 5, 2009	<u>S.B. No. 749</u>	In Favor
	<u>S.B. No. 750</u>	In Favor

Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli  
 Chief Child Protection Attorney &  
 Acting Chair of the Children's Trust Fund Counsel

Good Morning, Chairs and the members of the Select Committee on Children: I'd like to take this opportunity to offer testimony opposed to Proposed S.B. No. 174 An Act Concerning Child Support Obligations After Parental Rights are Terminated Due to Abuse or Neglect and in support of Proposed H.B. No. 5145 An Act Concerning Education of Students on the Prevention Of Shaken Baby Syndrome, S.B. No. 749 (Raised) An Act Concerning The Inclusion Of The Children's Trust Fund In The Early Childhood Education Cabinet, S.B. No. 750 (Raised) An Act Concerning Transfers Of Subsidized Guardianship. While I have two different roles in our child welfare system and in relation to these bills, as Chief Child Protection Attorney, I consider effective prevention of abuse and neglect from ever occurring an important component of an effective child protection system. The fewer children who experience abuse and neglect and who require the services of DCF, the juvenile court, and my attorneys, the less overwhelmed the child welfare system will be and the more successful we can be in addressing the needs of hopefully fewer and fewer abused and neglected children and helping their families be healthy, safe and together.

Senate Bill 174, while laudable in its aim to hold all parents accountable for the financial support of their children, including those who have lost their parental rights due to abuse and neglect, I am very concerned about the effect it will have on the cases in juvenile court of the children and parents to whom the Commission on Child Protection provides legal representation. As you know, achieving permanency and stability for children in DCF care is a critical yet often difficult goal to achieve. This bill, if enacted, will slow that process down for many children. It removes one of the key incentives for poor, incarcerated, struggling parents to consent to the termination petition. Consents help to avoid a lengthy trial, waiting up to 4 months for a decision and then a possible appeal, which can take up to 2 years. This legal process is a major obstacle to achieving permanency and stability for children in DCF care. In addition, the vast majority of parents who have termination petitions filed against them are indigent and it will be difficult and costly to collect the meager amounts of support available from

them. I respectfully request that this committee vote to oppose this bill in its current form as it does not appear to have an exception for consents to termination petitions that have been filed on behalf of children who were adjudicated neglected or abused in juvenile court.

House Bill 5145 is an important advancement in the efforts already underway by the Children's Trust Fund to prevent incidents of Shaken Baby Syndrome. The Children's Trust Fund has implemented a model of education on never shaking a baby and would be happy to assist in a program to bring this education into the schools and help prepare our youth for their future roles as caretakers and parents. Lack of understanding about normal infant behavior and the devastating and fatal effect shaking a baby in a time of stress and frustration can have are the primary contributors to this syndrome. Education on these issues is the key to prevention. Proper parenting and caretaking is critical to the well-being and future success of our children and we should take this step to ensure that all children grow and develop safely.

Senate Bill 749 to include the Children's Trust Fund in the Early Childhood Education Cabinet will provide an important opportunity for collaboration and efficiency of efforts among the leaders already in the Cabinet and the Children's Trust Fund. The work of the Fund to prepare at risk parents to provide for their infants in the most responsible, nurturing and stable way possible in spite of their many challenges and to give these children who are otherwise at risk for all the attendant problems for learning and developing the experiences of neglect and abuse bring, will be an important compliment to the work of the Cabinet. The Children's Trust Fund has proven its effectiveness in identifying, implementing, and ensuring best practices and positive outcomes in programs designed to improve parenting capacity and in turn children's functioning. Its work and knowledge gained over the last 16 years will prove invaluable to the Cabinet.

Senate Bill 750 is a common sense solution to a scenario that is not uncommon for children who have been the subject of neglect and abuse petitions and who have their guardianship transferred to a relative in order to achieve permanency. This bill will allow for a transfer of funding that really should follow the child and not be contingent upon the original guardian remaining capable of being the child's caretaker through his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I respectfully request that this Committee vote in favor of House Bill 5145 and Senate Bills 749 and 750.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Signorelli