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**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
February 6, 2009**

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. I am Peter O'Meara, Commissioner of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for raising our agency bills this session and for the opportunity to testify in support of DDS's agency proposals: **House Bill 6309, Senate Bill 789 and Senate Bill 756**. I provide you with the following comments in support of these bills.

HB 6309 An Act Concerning Administration of the Department of Developmental Services.
This bill has several technical components to it.

Sections 1-6 include technical changes related to the Birth to Three Program that reflect the existing rate structure for the program and change the language regarding responsibility for establishing local interagency coordinating councils (LICCs). The bill corrects several references to federal law that are incorrect and acknowledges that Birth to Three establishes rates for services. In addition, DDS would no longer be held responsible for ensuring that there is at least one LICC in each region. Currently, there are only two (2) LICCs, one in Danbury and one in Torrington (which are both in the Department's West Region). DDS will continue to support established LICCs. However, people concerned about infants and toddlers with disabilities may find joining local early planning groups, such as those funded by the Graustein Memorial Fund and the United Way of Middlesex County, preferable to joining a regional LICC as a way to advocate for young children with disabilities. We predict that eventually people who are on the LICCs will join with the larger early childhood community to ensure that children with disabilities are included in their blueprints.

Section 7 changes the term limits placed on membership for the Council on Developmental Services. Currently, there is a 6-year maximum on the number of consecutive years a member may serve. If the appointing authority does not immediately select a successor, there is oftentimes a lag between when a member must stop serving and a new member is appointed. This proposal would allow a current DDS council member to serve until a successor is appointed even if the member has served for more than 6 years.

Section 8 changes the membership of the Camp Harkness Advisory Committee to include a member representing a 501(c)3 established to promote and support Camp Harkness and its camping programs in lieu of a member representing the Camp Harkness Booster Club. It is DDS's understanding that a member of the Camp Harkness Booster Club has not attended Advisory Committee meetings for several years and correspondence to this organization has gone repeatedly unanswered. The appointing authority for this member is the Senate Majority Leader.

Section 9 would permit designees to be appointed for certain members on the statutory Family Support Council. Current statute only permits commissioners to have designees. The proposal also eliminates the two-term limitation for Family Support Council members in order to encourage continued membership on this important council, which coordinates family support services for children with disabilities across the state.

Section 10 eliminates the sunset provision of the Department's Abuse and Neglect Registry. This registry is an important tool used by the Department, its providers and other state agencies to check that potential employees have not previously been referred to the registry for abuse or neglect of a DDS consumer. Without elimination of the sunset provision, the Abuse and Neglect Registry would sunset in 2010.

SB 789 An Act Concerning the Sharing of Information Between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Developmental Services. This proposal would allow the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to share specific information with DDS related to DCF investigations, without the consent of the subject of the investigations, for the purposes of eligibility, enrollment and service planning for children in the DDS Voluntary Services Program (VSP). DDS has full responsibility for voluntary services for children who have mental retardation and are otherwise eligible for VSP. Access to DCF's investigation summaries is vital to ensure the development of an individual plan that addresses both the child's and family's needs with the goal of keeping children at home with the appropriate behavioral and in-home family supports. Information regarding previous DCF services or investigations is important to DDS in order to develop appropriate supports that will address any important family dynamics that might otherwise preclude the child being able to stay at home. SB 789 provides that DDS will notify families that this information can be shared without consent upon application to the DDS VSP program.

SB 756 An Act Concerning a Department of Children and Families Child Abuse and Neglect Registry Check for Applicants of Employment with the Department of Developmental Services or the Departments Providers. This proposal would allow the Commissioner of Developmental Services to require an applicant for employment with DDS or with an affiliated DDS private provider to submit to a check of the DCF child abuse and neglect registry. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and DCF currently have access to our department's Abuse and Neglect Registry. DMHAS also has access to DCF's child abuse and neglect registry and DDS is requesting the same access to this registry through this legislation. The sharing of this information among state agencies casts a wider safety net over the employment process and provides greater assurance of prohibiting individuals convicted of abuse and neglect in one agency's service system from seeking employment or providing services in another agency's service system.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time, or you may contact Christine Pollio, DDS Director of Legislative and Executive Affairs at 418-6066 with any questions.