

Testimony of M. Alex Geertsma, M.D.

**Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
February 11, 2010**

Senator Prague, Representative Hamm, Representative Villano and Members of the Committee,

My name is M. Alex Geertsma. I am the Medical Director of the Children's Health Center, Franklin Medical Group, St. Mary's Hospital, Waterbury, Connecticut. I am a member of the General Assembly's Medicaid Managed Care Council and a member of the Council's Quality Assurance Subcommittee, representing the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am also a member of the Commission on Children, appointed by Governor Rell as a "*Pediatrician who is knowledgeable in issues concerning children*". I have participated in and directed several pediatric healthcare improvement programs via the Connecticut DSS, DPH, and the National Initiative For Child Healthcare Quality.

Testimony:

Many years ago, when my daughter was in Washington working in the medical antitrust division of the FTC and heading toward law school, when we spoke over the phone, we would lovingly take shots at each other's profession. My daughter would berate me for "greedy" doctor groups and hospitals she would be bringing antitrust law suits against. I, in turn, would remind her of the latest public opinion polls on professions, rating lawyers near the bottom. However, we eventually would make up and then take solace in the fact that doctors and even lawyers ranked well above politicians and lobbyists.

There clearly has been an erosion in the public's view of government in our country. After many years of trying to advocate for improving the quality of life for all children, it would be easy for me to think skeptically of both the system I work in, the medical system, and also the system that is state government. It is easy to see them both as cold, impersonal, serving only one or limited masters. The sometimes cutthroat nature of medical competition in the name of economic survival, and the present national and

statewide political environment with all of its petty bickering and character assassination, can be discouraging.

I want you to know that I know better. I come before you today to remind all of you who are responsible for making, implementing, and nurturing good public policy that you can do and have done so very, very well by children. I have attached at the end of this testimony a sheet summarizing the areas of dedication to children that several of you and the Governor have worked tirelessly on. Those not included, I simply have personally not had the chance to know of yet.

These clearly are not the best of financial times. Cuts are painful. But all of you who know the wisdom of good choices and the risks of bad ones must appreciate the essential need for the Commission on Children. Children are our future; they are our reason for enduring hardship – personal, financial, and legislative.

My time on the commission has been an epiphany for me because I have come to realize that its work gives us hope in a time of cynicism; it helps restore optimism about the political process. You've heard so many examples of how the Commission on Children pays for itself many times over. But what I want to convey to you personally is just what a gift the Commission is to all of us. It is a true citizen collaboration of people from all walks of life and of all political persuasions. It is your source of unbiased non-partisan information. It is a conduit for good and effective policy development. It is a reliable link to all those who collaborate and work to improve the lives of children. In short, it represents all that is good about a participatory democracy.

Please do not give in to quick and simplistic financial solutions. We will have accomplished little by saving a small amount of money in exchange for the promise of our children's future. Please reaffirm all that you have accomplished for children by continuing to support the existence of the Commission on Children.

Champions for Connecticut's Children:

Senator Harp **Healthcare quality**

Senator Hartley **School Safety, teacher professional development**

Senator Handley **Education, teaching quality**

Senator Harris **Education, health, support for families of autistic children**

Senator Prague **So many things for children, but always a relentless gad-fly for children's healthcare quality**

Representative Walker **Juvenile justice**

Representative Fleischman **Education, health and safety of school environments**

Governor Rell ***Early childhood education and intervention***