**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee**
**in Support of the Commission on Children**
**February 11, 2010**
**Darcy Lowell, M.D.**

Good afternoon, Chairpersons, Senator Harp and Representative Geragosian and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of services for the most vulnerable children in Connecticut. I am specifically testifying **against Governor's Bill No. 5018** in order to **maintain the Commission on Children in the state budget.**

I am an Associate Clinical Professor at the Yale Child Study Center and Department of Pediatrics and Chief of the Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Bridgeport Hospital. I am the Executive Director of Child FIRST in Bridgeport, which serves very high risk, young children and families.

The Commission on Children is unique! It's **single focus is the welfare of Connecticut's children** – our future! It serves you, our legislature, in a bipartisan manner from within state government. The cost of running this agency is far, far outweighed by the **revenue it generates!** It **brings money to Connecticut** to serve the most vulnerable children and families. It does the research, brings together the necessary partners, and writes the laws. Most recently, it brought Connecticut $9.25 million dollars for SNAP E&T, and helped 95 communities apply. The Commission **brings in 22 times their budget,** and all this money goes to support families and state agencies in Connecticut. In this time of fiscal crisis, it makes absolutely no sense to eliminate the Commission on Children. If it did not exist, we would need to create it!

As a physician, I must stress to you the relationship between this fiscal crisis and the newest research on brain development. When we attempt to balance the budget on the backs of our poorest children and families, we dramatically increase the stress that they are experiencing. This stress is **toxic** to the developing brains of young children. It is poison. It **damages brain structure**, causing learning impairment, serious emotional disturbance, and long-term health problems. The damage cannot be undone. We will need to pour millions more into our schools, hospitals, and prisons as a consequence in the future, if we ignore the science today. We must protect our children.

The Commission on Children drives the policy that results in effective solutions. This protects the health, safety, and education of our children, especially for those in our state who are most vulnerable. The list of proactive, preventive programs

that they have brought to this state through legislation is enormous, including school readiness, lead abatement, and child poverty reduction. In each case, they have not only brought additional funding to our state, but have saved us millions of dollars by preventing serious and costly problems from arising.

As Executive Director of Child FIRST, I have personally experienced the effects of the Commission's research and support, and how it has directly impacted the lives of children in Bridgeport. Child FIRST is a model program which works with the most vulnerable young children and families to prevent developmental and learning problems, serious emotional disturbance, and abuse and neglect.

I could tell you about 3 year old Juan who watched his father dragged away in hand-cuffs in the middle of the night, and then became so angry and aggressive that he was expelled from three preschools and almost needed hospitalization; or I could tell you about 5 year old Carlos who wanted to jump out the window and die so he could be with his father, whom he watched shot to death; or I could tell you about four year old Tanya whose mother ran from a domestic violence situation and was desperate and almost suicidal. In all situations, Child FIRST was able to intervene early, intensively, and effectively through a combination of wraparound services and psychotherapeutic support. These children are thriving. Our intervention with Juan alone probably saved the state $800,000 in psychiatric hospitalization costs.

These stories document the immediate effect the Commission has on children and families. The Commission on Children researched and supported Child FIRST, knowing that it could **save the state of Connecticut millions of dollars.** And because of their efforts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has granted the state of Connecticut **over three million dollars** to facilitate replication in four new Connecticut cities. In addition, we are leveraging an additional **one million dollars** from our own Connecticut foundations. This will save Connecticut millions of dollars and **never would have happened without the vision, expertise, knowledge, and persistence of the Commission on Children.**

**If you care about our children, please, save the Commission on Children!**

**Thank you so much.**

Respectfully submitted,
Darcy I. Lowell, M.D.