



Jeanne Milstein
Child Advocate

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
999 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut 06105

TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE
BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

March 4, 2010

Good Morning Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Select Committee on Children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify **in support of House Bill No. 5360, An Act Concerning Children in the Recession.**

I have had opportunities to address Speaker Donovan's Task Force on Children in the Recession. I commend them on their hard work, leading to their thoughtful and comprehensive report that sets forth the recommendations in Bill No. 5360. I am enthusiastically in support of this bill, as it provides for real and tangible approach to strengthening the safety net for Connecticut's families and children.

For families, the devastating effects of a recession are not confined to economic struggles. Research and anecdotal evidence demonstrate strong correlations between poverty and child abuse and neglect. Drastic financial changes are also linked to increases in substance abuse, domestic violence, and school drop-out rates. Loss of income often leads families to decrease or completely cease giving children prescription medications or seeking medical care because of the expense of their co-payments. Even when families are able to maintain their rent or mortgage payments during periods of unemployment or underemployment, the threat of utility shut-offs due to inability to pay heating and electric bills looms large, and children are often found to be living in homes with inadequate or unsafe utilities. There is also concern that instances of shaken-baby syndrome may be rising as a result of caregivers' increased levels of stress and frustration over unemployment and lay-offs. These are but a few examples of the complex interaction between economic hardship and risks to the safety and well-being of children.

House Bill No. 5360 comprises a thoughtful and coordinated response to these concerns. The bill specifically targets services that comprise the safety net for families facing the profound effects of the recession. This bill provides for job training and educational opportunities, including increased eligibility for student loans. We know from the work of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council that attaining increased post-secondary education will have the greatest positive impact on improving families' financial stability.

Phone (860) 566-2106 • Toll Free (800) 994-0939 • Fax (860) 566-2251

Web Site: www.ct.gov/oca • E-Mail: Jeanne.Milstein@ct.gov

An Affirmative Action / Equal Opportunity Employer

Child care subsidies also allow both parents to work or attend school while their children are cared for in a safe environment. Rental housing and utility assistance, and foreclosure prevention services will help families avert homelessness and discontinuation of utility service. Food and nutritional support programs for homes and schools, and enhanced access to health insurance will provide the fundamental needs for children's health. Youth engagement and leadership opportunities in our communities will instill in the next generation the value of working together for the benefit of all. The critical importance of these efforts will ensure a healthy society in which families are safe and productive, and children are nurtured and educated; the importance of the safety net cannot be overstated.

Further, the practices promoted by this bill in order to provide these services, including interagency data-sharing; collaborative strategic planning; cross-training of agency staff; streamlined application processes; facilitating families' access to services; partnering with community agencies, private providers, municipalities, and philanthropic organizations; maximizing federal funds; reporting in an RBA framework; and engaging youth in communities, are all good practice – and good business – for human service agencies, not only when the state is in the throes of recession, but also during more prosperous times. I urge you on behalf of children to support House Bill No. 5360. There is no better time than right now for Connecticut's state agencies to embrace and enact this bill, and these practices, to improve outcomes for the families we serve.