



State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

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Select Committee on Children  
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Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee,

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am here today to speak on behalf of R.B. 5160, An Act Concerning Results Based Accountability, R.B. 5161, An Act Requiring DCF Training on Grandparent Visitation Rights, R.B. 153 An Act Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children and;

**R.B. 5160**-The Commission on Children would be honored to work with the Select Committee, OLR and OFA on an annual report card on child outcomes. We have been releasing a social health index for 16 years. The Index, brought into statute as Public Act No. 97-312, was developed by our agency with then Senate Pro Tempore John Larson.

The Social State of Connecticut is the stock portfolio of our social health. It is an index of social, economic and health areas that impact children, the family and our work life. No single issue or agency dominates. It spans generations and regions of the state. Our everyday living is captured annually and described in consumer-friendly terms.

Three decades are graphed to highlight patterns of success or challenge within eleven social health areas. Each indicator is traced over thirty, ten and five years to show us long as well as short term gains or losses. A single number averages these eleven indicators together. As the Gross Domestic Product or the Dow Jones informs us on the economy, this number informs us on social health.

The child indicators include infant mortality, child abuse, youth suicide, high school dropouts and teen births. The adult indicators include unemployment, average weekly wages and health insurance. Thus some of the indicators referenced in R.B. 5160 are included in the Index (child abuse, child poverty, low birth-weight). In 2008, we also looked at Young People and the Law with a three year comparison and overall trends in juvenile arrests.

The cost of this work is a mere \$30,000 as the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund partners with us and pays the other half. The Tow Foundation pays for the youth section. Thus when the cost of this is written up, the work can be considered profoundly low cost for the gains achieved in accountability.

**R.B. 5161**-Intergenerational connection can heal the soul, offer respite, provide history, and bring spirit to the room. There's better food in the kitchen, the texture changes; ordinarily more comfort and love arrives for the child. Something palpable and also something not quite palpable abounds.

Grandparents are often ignored once a parent divorces, passes away, or custody status changes. This is unfair to the development of the child and to the heart of the grandparent. There has been some effort at changing law to improve grandparent visitation rights. This comes up against numerous constitutional issues and is more complex than it appears.

However, training departments on the importance of grandparents to children, in most cases, is an easier venue for reform. I would also suggest that we consider offering training to the facilitators providing parent education training to newly divorcing couples. As we require a course in our state for couples so that they learn how to work with their children during and after divorce, they should also be reminded of the importance of grandparents.

**S.B. 153**-Under this bill, any prosecution of a minor for prostitution would presume that the minor was coerced into this act by a human trafficker. This is a sound measure that would ensure that sexually exploited children are presumed to be victims. Rather than lock them up in juvenile detention facilities, judges would be required to offer these children the crisis intervention and healthcare services that they need to recover from emotional manipulation and abuse. This bill is based on a landmark law enacted by New York State in 2008.

We have learned through our work on the Trafficking in Persons Council that Connecticut is a thoroughfare for human trafficking of all kinds, including child prostitution. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, children are most likely to be introduced into the sex industry when they are between the ages of 12 and 15. Some are kidnapped and forced into the trade. Many are runaways, delinquents and addicts. Once snapped up by human traffickers, victims are subjected to starvation, confinement, physical abuse and rape as a means of "keeping them in line". We must begin treating trafficked children like the victims they are. By treating the child in question as a victim rather than as a criminal, this bill takes an important step to help child trafficking victims recover their dignity and their future.

The Commission also supports R.B. 155 and 156. Educational stability and proper records should be presumed for any child, regardless of circumstance.