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

Good Morning Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Select Committee on Children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill No. 154, An act Authorizing a Differential Response by the Department of Children and Families to Reports of Child Abuse, Senate Bill No. 156, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Educational Credits and House Bill No. 5041, An Act Concerning Cross-Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty.

I fully support Senate Bill No. 154. This bill would allow Connecticut to embark on a much-needed reform effort in its child protection and child welfare practice. Implemented responsibly and effectively, Differential Response can allow a move away from an incident-based, adversarial investigation for all Hotline reports toward a more family assessment and engagement oriented approach for some accepted child maltreatment reports.<sup>1</sup>

The success of the Differential Response System (DRS) depends upon the capacity of our communities and community providers to provide an array of supportive services to families. Before DCF can successfully implement DRS, it must know the gaps in services within the identified community and develop services to fill those gaps. In fact, DCF attempted to implement a DRS pilot project in Hartford several years ago. The attempt failed, in large part because DCF did not first ensure that the community had the capacity to provide necessary services. Today, DCF is working with Casey Family Services consultants to complete and analyze a DRS Community Readiness Planning initiative.

The success of DRS also depends upon the ability of DCF staff to work collaboratively with families and providers. The Juan F. federal Monitor has consistently reported that that DCF continues to be deficient in the area of engagement and collaboration with families and providers. DRS will not be a solution to this deficiency and DRS cannot be successful until this deficiency is addressed.

Despite significant work that must still be completed by DCF, and the need for increased support for a continuum of supportive and mental health services for children and families, I believe that DRS is a worthy endeavor. This bill is an important step toward this goal.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Study On Differential Response In Child Welfare*, American Humane Association And Child Welfare League Of America, November 2006.



**I fully support Senate Bill No. 156, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Educational Credits.** This bill would help to ensure that all children who are admitted to one of DCF's institutions or facilities, and whose needs require that their education be provided within that facility by the Unified School District II, will have their educational credits transferred expeditiously when they are enrolled in a new school district. DCF policy already requires that prior to discharge from Unified School District II, the School District shall communicate with the child's parent or guardian or educational surrogate and with the Local Education Agency who will have responsibility for the child upon discharge. This bill can provide further quality assurance by requiring timeframes that the receiving School District will provide written notice of enrollment to DCF, that DCF shall transfer the child's educational records to the new school district, and that the new School District shall credit the student for all work received while enrolled in Unified School District II. The bill can provide additional support to important efforts to ensure educational stability for children in the care of DCF and our state-operated facilities.

**I fully support House Bill No.5041, An Act Concerning Cross-Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty.** Frequently, animal abuse is part of a continuum of abuse within families. Often, animal abuse represents a way to coerce, intimidate, and further control child victims and force them into silence and fear. Studies of homes in which children are abused have found a significant rate of instances of abuse of animals in the home as well.<sup>2</sup> Cross-reporting among DCF employees and animal control officers would heighten awareness among child welfare and animal control professionals of this strong correlation and likely improve outcomes for both children and animals. This bill support the critical need for prevention and early intervention related to child maltreatment and childhood behavioral and mental health issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions that you may have.

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<sup>2</sup> *People and Animals, Kindness and Cruelty: Research Directions and Policy Implications.* Frank R. Ascione and Kenneth Shapiro, *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 569-587 (2009).

