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Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations committee.

My name is Jody Rowell and I am a licensed clinical social worker and advocate for children and families. I am here today to voice my concern about the proposed cuts to the Office of Child Advocate.

The Office of Child Advocate is charged with multiple duties under CGSA Sec. 46a-131. The statute provides that the Office will 1) evaluate the delivery services by state agencies and state funded child services 2) review complaints concerning any state or municipal agency providing child services and make appropriate referrals and investigate those where the Advocate determines a child or family may be in need of assistance or that a systemic issue in the state's provision of services to children is raised; 3) periodically review the facilities and procedures of any and all institutions or residences, public or private, where a juvenile has been placed; 4) recommend changes in state systems including juvenile justice, child care, foster care and treatment; 5) take all possible action including but not limited to public education, legislative advocacy, systemic reform and formal legal action in order to secure and ensure the legal, civil and special rights of CT's children. And this is only a partial list.

The job assigned to OCA by the legislature is onerous but their work is invaluable. In the past, OCA has raised and addressed issues such as protecting children from undue restraint while in state custody; bringing children back to their community by decreasing

costly out-of-state placements and increasing community-based services, removing female juveniles from adult prisons, and recommending changes to strengthen a dwindling foster care system. OCA gives voice to the most vulnerable among us.

Review of the Governor's proposed budget seems to insinuate that the majority of these duties might be addressed by agents of the Executive Branch. I maintain the State of CT and DCF have been under the watchful eyes of the federal government for almost 20 years and yet as early as last year failed to meet a child's treatment needs 50% of the time. To date only 63% percent of the outcome measures under the Consent Decree have been met. Who will speak for these children especially in an economic downturn? I dare say DCF and the Governor have their hands full.

An 80% staffing cut at the Child Advocate's Office simply means the most vulnerable children of our state will lose their only voice, the voice that protects them and strives to ensure that children maintain a level of dignity, respect and protection they deserve even during our state's most challenging times.

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