

**Testimony of Margie B. Gillis to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut
Legislature concerning the Commission on Children**

March 1, 2011

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, I write this testimony to urge you to maintain support for the Commission on Children. Since 2000, I and the hundreds of teachers whom I've helped teach, as well as the children whom these teachers have taught, have been the benefactors of the Commission's vision, policy acumen, and dedication to raising the achievement of every child in our state.

Specifically, the Commission helped bring to light that for many years running, only 4 out of 10 CT fourth graders score at grade level and that our state's achievement gap, which is in fact a reading gap, is the largest nationwide. Over the past decade, the Commission has kept reading in the forefront in many ways – through the Early Reading Success Legislation, by spearheading the Connecticut Early Reading Success Panel that produced Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement, by promoting school readiness and by fighting to preserve Early Reading Success funding, and by working with legislators to ensure that the bills they raise include policies that will help close the reading gap.

In fact, it was the Commission who persuaded Haskins Laboratories to share scientific research and to develop a model to bring comprehensive, research-based reading instruction into schools. It was the Commission who introduced legislation to require early childhood and elementary school teachers to pass a reading instruction test in order to become certified. The legislation failed, but the Commission did not as former Commissioner of Education Mark McQuillan implemented such a policy in 2009.

The Commission has also been instrumental in assisting parents in learning how to lead for their children. The Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Education Excellence are the most well-organized, high-quality efforts at engaging parents in community involvement on behalf of their children that I have EVER seen in my 37 years as a professional educator. These programs are critical in building the necessary infrastructure to ensure that children have what they need to be successful in life – hinging on a necessary home-school-community collaboration.

I also want to highlight the efforts of the individual who directs the Commission's work, Elaine Zimmerman. Although I was not working in Connecticut before Ms. Zimmerman took over as its

Executive Director, I can't imagine a more qualified, passionate, connected, and intelligent individual to fulfill the Commission's vision. We have worked very closely together over the years to bring teachers, administrators, parents, and legislators together in the name of providing a high-quality reading education to every child in the state. She has made it her personal and professional mission to keep everyone's eyes on the prize – that is, making sure the children's needs are met – not only in reading, but in every aspect of their lives.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Commission and its Director, Elaine Zimmerman, have been accountable to the state of Connecticut and our children. Now it is time for the state to remain accountable to our children, by standing by the Commission. If they can't speak for our children, who will?

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margie B. Gillis".

Margie B. Gillis, Research Affiliate, Haskins Laboratories; President, Literacy How, Inc.