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Kathryn Steadman
Juvenile Contract Attorney
Commission on Child Protection
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Legislative Budget Hearings Written Testimony:

I am a Juvenile Contract Attorney. I work in Middletown at the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters representing indigent parents and children who are involved with the Department of Children and Families. I am a solo practitioner who has made Child Protection work the sole focus of my practice. I live and work and pay taxes in this state.

I am also a Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist. In order to become certified, I had to demonstrate a commitment to and proficiency in the area of child protection. I was recommended by two judges and six of my peers. I studied for months and sat for a 6 hour exam. Connecticut is fortunate- there are 81 certified attorneys in this state. More than in any other state in the country.

I represent those who have no voice. My cases range from parents seeking the assistance of the Department of Children and Families in procuring services for their children with special needs to horrific abuse. My cases involve neglect of children by parents who may be buckling under the terrible weight of poverty and generational conditions. Parents who are disenfranchised, under educated, mentally ill or have substance abuse issues. Children who have grown up under conditions that you and I cannot imagine and yet they are resilient and growing- and they love their parents with a ferocity that can break your heart.

Connecticut is lucky to have myself and my many talented peers who are willing and eager to do this work. We are a bargain! We do not receive any additional benefit from the State of Connecticut- we pay for our own healthcare and retirement. We pay full Occupational taxes. We receive no Worker's Compensation if we are injured while visiting families in some of the worst conditions and neighborhoods in our cities and towns. We pay for our own malpractice insurance. We pay our taxes. Some of us employ staff- some of us do not. We are not asking for more. We are not asking for these things from you. All we are asking you for is enough to do this vitally important work. One of our own contract attorneys from New Britain said it best-- ***we are tremendously talented attorneys who are exquisitely gifted in the human aspect of lawyering.*** That is who we are and that is what we do.

Governor Malloy has suggested a budget of 14.6 million dollars to fund this work in FY12. We are urging you to allot us that full amount. If the health of Connecticut's families is important to you, please understand that we need this amount to continue to provide the highest quality legal representation to the most vulnerable of Connecticut's families. We stand as David to the Goliath that is DCF. We make sure that agency follows the rules that have been laid out by this body, the United States Supreme Court, and the federal government. We protect the fundamental right of family integrity.

We are not asking for more-- we are asking you for enough.