

Testimony for Appropriations Committee  
In support of continued funding for

**The Children's Law Center of CT, Inc.**

Submitted by: Justine Rakich-Kelly  
Executive Director

Good evening. My name is Justine Rakich-Kelly and I am the executive director of the Children's Law Center of CT. We are more commonly known as CLC.

I come before you this evening to support the budget as proposed by Governor Malloy, specifically, the line item in the prevention budget for Children's Legal Services. Please note that this is a line item to support the Children's Law Center of CT and was mislabeled in the budget.

The board and staff of the Children's Law Center are extremely grateful that the value of our services has not been overlooked by this administration. We applaud the effort to continue to protect vulnerable children as reflected in many areas of the budget.

The Children's Law Center's mission is to protect poor children who are caught in the middle of their parents' family court war. By virtue of being the children of parents who are engaging in a high conflict battle over custody and visitation, they are put at risk, psychologically and often times, physically.

In fact, you may be familiar with the reason CLC was founded – it was because a 6 year old girl was shot and murdered by her father during a court-ordered supervised visitation session. About 10 years later, another murder occurred. A father murdered his wife and two teenaged daughters and burned the house down with their bodies in it. I attended that funeral, which was surrounded by police and investigators who were still searching for the father. It was horrible. It brought all of us together, realizing the crucial nature of our work.

We represent poor children in family court. Their parents are fighting over them, but are often overlooking their needs and desires. We provide the court with a window to the family dynamic and work with the parents to try to create agreements or recommendations that foster and cultivate a safe and nurturing relationship between parents and children.

Parents should never be made to feel marginalized or inconsequential to the lives of their children. Children should always have an opportunity to develop strong bonds with both parents, without fear of reprisal or challenges to their loyalty. It is our job to help families restructure in a way that is least harmful to all involved and focuses on the well being of children.

Our role in the family dispute allows us a unique opportunity to identify and help address challenges faced in the family. Once those challenges are met, addressed and, ultimately, overcome, the healing that takes place removes the high conflict from the family court case.

That's what we do for families.

Here's what we do for you. . . the State of Connecticut.

Beyond helping children, in family court cases, we are called upon to act as an intermediary for parenting adjustments, communication, education, and any other issues that may arise. We work to quell these skirmishes so the parties don't end up in court every week to address basic parenting issues.

In our cases,

- 100% are identified as high conflict
- 100% include a significant risk posed to the child or children
- 66% have past or ongoing DCF services with whom we work collaboratively
- 90% percent of our cases end in agreement avoiding multi-day trials
- 99% percent of our recommendations to the Court are incorporated into the Court's orders
- 87% of cases handled by CLC remain closed and do not return to court for further litigation
- We continue to monitor the family after judgment to quell any disputes that may arise so the family can avoid returning to court
- Our free Children's Law Line helps people navigate the legal system in a more efficient manner
- Our family mediation program provides a viable alternative to returning to court, alleviating the burden on the court and court services.

We appreciate your recognition of the contributions we make to Connecticut, and ask that you continue to support us and renew our contract.

Thank you.