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March 3, 2011

TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY JENNIFER M. CELENTANO

Good evening. My name is Jennifer M. Celentano and I am an attorney with a private practice in North Haven, CT. I currently have a contract through CCPA representing parents and children in DCF abuse and neglect proceedings and delinquency proceedings. I have been practicing law for 10 years and am a member of the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Association, Connecticut Bar Association, American Association for Justice and the New Haven County Bar Association. I am currently the Vice-Chair Elect of the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Women's' Caucus.

I understand that decision-making in this economic climate is difficult if not impossible and that the Appropriations Committee has a formidable task at hand. Notwithstanding the inherent difficulties, I would urge the Appropriations Committee and the Legislature as a whole to support funding for CCPA.

It is tempting to try to cut budgets when people are poor and disadvantaged because in reality it is probably the path of least resistance. This thinking is short-sighted. Moreover, we have an obligation to parents and children in DCF proceedings to ensure there is fundamental fairness and that the parties are represented and heard. The Department of Children and Families is still working under the consent decree in the Juan F. case where a Federal Court monitor has consistently found the Department has not met its obligations to provide services and address the needs of children in its care. It is critical that funding is adequate to allow attorneys to represent parties in

these very difficult, often heart-breaking, abuse and neglect proceedings and juvenile delinquency proceedings.