

Testimony for the Appropriations Public Hearing on 3/1/11 Regarding the Commission on Children...

I am a concerned parent, voter and taxpaying resident of Bridgeport. I join with other constituents, particularly parent leaders throughout our state to request our state representatives and senators protect funding in our state budget for the education, health and safety of our children.

Please support funding for the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund. Since 1997, (14 years) Bridgeport parent and community leaders and organizations such as the Parent Center, RYASAP, BAYC, Bridgeport Public Education Fund and Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition have collaborated with the Commission on Children to offer the Parent Leadership Training Institute.

In those 14 years, hundreds of parents have graduated to become community leaders serving in various capacities including City Commissioners, Community Council officers, Board of Education Appointee, School District and local Parent Advisory Council officers, Board Chair and members of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition. Graduates have successfully implemented community projects to prevent teen pregnancy, increase family literacy, promote healthy living and wellness for children and parents, support education via advocacy, after-school programs, and provision of school supplies, mentor and tutor children, increase community awareness and collaboration of resources, clean up and revitalize a city neighborhood, park and tennis courts. Many of these volunteer projects were done in partnership with city and school officials and other community organizations that care for our children.

As you all must know, the rate of child poverty in Bridgeport is more than twice the statewide rate and almost 50% higher than the national rate. In 2007 over 9,900 children in Bridgeport were in living poverty. Bridgeport PLTI seeks to enable parents to become change agents and leading advocates for these children and others. We ask you, our legislators, to join us as leading child advocates to maintain funding for the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund on behalf of Bridgeport PLTI. In considering the amount of money involved, remember that the COC cost less than a dollar per child in CT and through the Parent Trust Fund the state has an opportunity to gain matching dollars of approximately \$250,000 through a public-private partnerships to support quality parent engagement throughout the state.

The proposed state cuts to children centered systems, agencies, initiatives, and commissions are too costly a measure in your efforts to balance the budget. The ultimate price is the drastic and long lasting impact on our children who cannot and should not be told that they have to incur these expenses. I urge the Bridgeport Delegation and all legislators not to charge the quality of life account of our children once again. Although children are amazingly resilient we as adults still have an obligation and responsibility to ensure their well being.

Respectfully Submitted by: Donna Thompson-Bennett
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