

Appropriations Committee

March 4, 2011

Testimony of Laura Grondin
Member of the Board of Directors
of the
Children's Law Center of CT, Inc.

Good evening. My name is Laura Grondin. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Children's Law Center of CT. I am submitting this testimony in support of the line item of Governor Malloy's budget committed to Children's Legal Services.

We are very grateful to Governor Malloy and the legislators for creating a budget that reflects a continuing commitment to Connecticut's children.

The Children's Law Center of Connecticut (CLC) was founded upon a tragedy which magnified to the community the risk that is posed to young children who are caught in the cross fire of parental custody battles. When 6 year old Kayla was murdered by her father during a visitation, Connecticut's legal system was stunned. As parents, business leaders, and compassionate citizens, there was public outcry and the result was the birth of the Children's Law Center, an organization whose mission is to protect vulnerable, poor children in the family court process.

As a business leader in this state, I am well aware of the enormous fiscal challenge this state faces. I am equally aware however, that funding CLC is a cost savings to the state's bottom line.

CLC's Law Line assists callers by giving information, advice and referrals regarding issues that effect children. Callers, who cannot afford attorneys of their own, are educated about the Court system. The direct result of this service is self represented parties who understand the process and utilize it efficiently, rather than those numerous

self represented parties who file incorrect motion, attend court unprepared and congest the court system. It should be noted that the majority of referral sources for the Law Line is the State of Connecticut, namely, DCF, the Courts, Probation, Family Relations, and 211.

Our mediation program, Families in Transition, is designed to divert high conflict families out of the court system and give them the opportunity to create parenting plans that are appropriate for their children. Over 80% of our referrals to the FIT program comes from the Court. In fact, many of our families are court ordered to attend the program. Once positive results are reached and the parents have learned to communicate and trouble shoot, their days of usurping court resources are over.

Our representation program, our cornerstone, provides invaluable service to the Court. Our attorneys work with parents and children to determine what resources can assist the family and what orders would work best to address the lives of our child clients. In 99% of our cases, the judge enters orders that reflect our recommendations. We also provide post judgment monitoring services so that parties can count on us to assist them with minor glitches – a visitation time change, a dance recital, a last minute little league game – we can help them communicate and resolve these disputes, instead of these molehills becoming giant mountains that again further burden our court system. In the cases that close in our office, 86% do not return to court.

It is my sincere hope that you will continue to recognize the value of the services provided by The Children's Law Center of CT and keep this vital organization fully funded in the amount of \$150,000. Given the benefits received, it is a small investment with a huge return.

Respectfully,

Laura Grondin