

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
March 30, 2011

Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli  
Chief Child Protection Attorney

**SB 1222 SUPPORT w/  
suggested clarifying language**



Commission on Child Protection  
*State of Connecticut*

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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and esteemed Committee Members, for the record, my name is Carolyn Signorelli, Chief Child Protection Attorney for the State of Connecticut.

I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of SB 1222, *AN ACT CONCERNING PARENTS WITH CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS*.

As many of you are aware, the Commission on Child Protection and my office are responsible for the system of legal representation for children and parents in cases of abuse, neglect and termination of parental rights brought by the Department of Children and Families in Juvenile Court. It is my responsibility to ensure that children and parents receive quality legal representation consistent with the Standards of Practice that the Commission on Child Protection has established pursuant to its enabling legislation.

In addition, the Commission and my office are also responsible for providing indigent contemnors facing incarceration for non-payment of child support with legal representation. My office has contracted with attorneys to provide this statutorily required representation in 17 courts at a cost of \$820,000.00 per year.

I support the establishment of these pilot programs which will not only provide opportunity for parents to gain employment, but can potentially save money expended through my office to defend contempt citations where there is a threat of incarceration. Currently, if a low income obligor is brought to court for contempt of a child support order, he or she is entitled to state paid legal representation due to the possibility of being incarcerated if contempt is found and a finding that he or she is indigent and cannot afford counsel.

In order to assure that there is a cost savings to the State of Connecticut, however, it will be important to clarify that there is no right to counsel during the referral process into the program, nor during the pendency of the parent's involvement in the pilot program. Otherwise, any potential for cost savings for legal representation intended through eliminating the threat of incarceration may not be realized, and could potentially cost additional State dollars.

In addition, there is currently a Pilot Problem Solving Court being conducted in New Haven, which, while having the same goal of the pilots proposed in this legislation, seeks to address barriers that a child support obligor may have to accepting and maintaining employment. Some of the participants in this program may not be in a position due to mental health, substance abuse and educational issues to accept employment opportunities offered immediately. These individuals should also not be exposed to the threat of incarceration if they comply with the Pilot Problem Solving Program.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the Judiciary Committee act favorably upon this proposal and consider my suggestion to assure that the cost of legal representation provided by the Commission on Child Protection is significantly reduced in the pilot courts, as well as in the existing Problem Solving pilot program.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. If there are any questions, I welcome them at this time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Signorelli