Testimony of David Tompkins of Klingberg Family Services

for Raised Bill No. 6340

An Act Concerning the Placement of Children in Out-of-State Treatment Facilities

2-22-2011

My name is David Tompkins and I currently serve children and families in Connecticut through various roles. Within my role as the Vice-President of Education, Child Placement and Group Care at Klingberg Family Centers, located in New Britain, I oversee a continuum of services for youth which includes a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF), a Residential Treatment program, Therapeutic Group Homes, a Special Educational School, a program for youth with acute medical and psychiatric needs and a Foster Care and Adoption program. Additionally, I serve as a Co-Chair of the Children's Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (CBHAC) and Chair of the Children's Council for the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits. My experience in all of these roles brings me here today to testify regarding Raised Bill No. 6340.

I think we can all agree that meeting the treatment needs of children and families in Connecticut is preferable to having those needs met in an out-of-state program. That said, there are two significant pieces of this bill that need to be revised before it is passed.

The language calling for the superior court for juvenile matters review needs to be removed until sufficient funding is available to create the programs in Connecticut that these youth need. While court oversight of out-of-state placements would provide another layer of review for the placements, it would be virtually meaningless unless programs that will meet the treatment needs of these youth are available in Connecticut. A court order to place a youth in a Connecticut program that does not exist is a waste of our valuable tax payer's dollars. The lack of programs in Connecticut to meet the treatment needs of these youth needs to be addressed before a court orders a placement to a nonexistent program.

The youth affected by this bill are not out-of-state because DCF wants them to be there. During the past several years the Department of Children and Families has attempted to work with providers to create these needed programs. In almost all cases, even when the department and the provider agree on a specific program there has been no money available to allow for start up costs and to pay the rate necessary for the provider to come even close to breaking even financially. We cannot make up for losing money with volume. Given current available funding the providers are simply prohibited from stepping up to the plate, as I have heard referenced, because they cannot afford to do so. Unless this issue is addressed, the superior court will have no more ability than DCF does now to return these youth to Connecticut.

The second item that raises concern is the language found in Sec. 2. It currently states, "The commissioner of Children and Families shall ... develop a plan to reallocate funds appropriated to the department and maximize federal and private funding to **increase in-state, community-based services** for children transitioning from out-of-state facilities". Youth treated within our continuum of care need to have all levels of the continuum available to them and their families. If the language is left as written youth would be returning to Connecticut ONLY to community-based services, leaving out all congregate care programs as an option. While this plan is favored it is not realistic and needs to be revised to include all programs available within Connecticut.