



Greenwich United Way

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February 18, 2011

**Comments re: S.B. No. 981 (RAISED) SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN. 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN CONGREGATE CARE FACILITIES', to prohibit the Commissioner of Children and Families from placing children under the age of six, or sibling groups with a child under the age of six, in congregate care facilities unless necessary for health reasons.
REF. SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN**

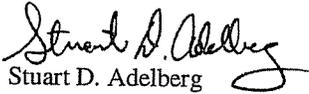
I write as the President of the Greenwich United Way, the largest non-government funder of critical human service programs in our community, and an organization regarded by municipal leaders for over seventy-five years as experts in documenting human service needs and developing collaborative, meaningful and sustainable solutions. Though previously scheduled commitments make it impossible for me to attend the Public Hearing regarding the above referenced bill on Tuesday, February 22, 2011, I wish to express concerns about the impact of this proposed legislation and, therefore, respectfully offer these comments to you in writing.

I have no doubt that S.B. no. 981 was proposed with the most sincere and best interests of Connecticut's youngest children in mind. No one would argue that in the best of circumstances, all young children belong in loving homes, with caring families that have the resources and capabilities to keep them safe and secure. When, for any number of reasons, a young child must be placed in another setting by the State, our natural inclination is to replace that loving home and family with another traditional looking home that models the ideal. Unfortunately, though it may seem counterintuitive, we have learned that this is not always the best solution. Fortunately, there is a wonderful alternative, but that alternative would not be available to Connecticut's youngest children if the above bill is made into law.

Over thirty years ago, the Greenwich United Way studied the need for emergency services for children who, for a variety of reasons, were not able to remain safe and secure in their own homes. This work led to a collaborative project that ultimately created an agency called The Youth Shelter. At the outset, the focus was on teenagers. Though the agency was professionally staffed 24 hours a day, it was set up to look, feel and operate as a home and a family, not an institutional treatment facility. Approximately fifteen years later, The Youth Shelter expanded its program and facilities to meet the growing, well documented need for similar services for younger children, newborns through the age of twelve. A few years later, the agency changed its name to Kids in Crisis, but it remains one of the finest and most respected not-for-profit organizations in the State of Connecticut. It is also regarded by those who work with our most vulnerable children, as one of the State's greatest success stories - providing the finest in crisis intervention and counseling, therapeutic services, health care, and, of course, emergency shelter in a warm and loving family environment that would be envied by many traditional families.

Kids in Crisis was designed to be used in an emergency as a relatively short term solution, and I acknowledge that there are times that children have remained with the agency longer than some might wish. This is not due to any deficit on the part of the agency, but speaks, instead to the continuing challenge, throughout the State of Connecticut, of enlisting the services of a sufficient number of well trained and supervised foster families who can safely and appropriately identify and deal with the myriad issues these children present. I would agree that the State would be well served by additional foster families, but in the current environment it is far better to make use of an exceptional agency with the capacity to provide professional, compassionate and loving care for our youngest children, than to place these children even farther away from their homes, families and communities in less than ideal circumstances.

An initial reading of S.B. No. 981 seems to make a great deal of sense. The term "congregate care facility" exudes the impression of a cold and impersonal institution, the last place any of us would want to place a small child. And yet, both as a parent and as a professional who has devoted over twenty-five years to seeking compassionate solutions to some of the most difficult circumstances confronting individuals and families, I say with complete confidence that there are organizations, like Kids in Crisis, that may be described by some as "congregate care facilities" but that any one of us would be blessed to call home. I urge you not to take that opportunity away from the children who need us most.


Stuart D. Adelberg
President

