

**TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE
BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 3, 2011**

Good afternoon, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 6225, An Act Requiring A Results-Based Accountability Report Card On Out-Of-State Residential Treatment Of Children, Senate Bill No. 846, An Act Concerning The Transfer Of Educational Credits, and House Bill No. 6226, An Act Concerning Cross-Reporting Of Child Abuse And Animal Cruelty.

I fully support House Bill No. 6225, An Act Requiring A Results-Based Accountability Report Card On Out-Of-State Residential Treatment Of Children.

As of December of 2010, Connecticut had 367 children placed outside the state in residential mental health treatment facilities. The housing, treatment, education, and visitation of those 367 children reportedly cost Connecticut 35 million dollars last year, yet we have no outcome data to tell us whether those children are significantly better off for being in these out-of-state treatment programs.

A Results-Based Accountability report card would provide a tool to assess the overall benefits of placing children outside of Connecticut relative to its costs.

The cost of out-of-state placement to children and communities cannot be overstated. Sending children to live out of state effectively severs their engagement with their families, schools, and communities. It interferes with plans for timely discharge and transition back to the child's home and community. Even when families are involved and are provided with visits, family obligations such as other children, job schedules, transportation availability, etc. frequently require that visits occur at times when qualified clinical staff are not available to facilitate therapeutic contact.

Children who are sent out of state for treatment are in effect given the implicit message that they are too sick, too "bad," or too disabled for their families or for the wealthiest state in the country to be able to care for them. To illustrate how clearly children hear this message, I will share with you a brief story of an OCA staff member who visited a child who was placed in Virginia several years ago. After the Assistant Child Advocate introduced herself, the child asked her, "are you going to be my mommy?"

It is of utmost importance that Connecticut's communities care for their children. Bill No. 6225 will allow us to undertake an assessment of which children are being sent out of state, and what their needs are. It is crucial that we also assess any capacity Connecticut's providers might have to care for these children closer to their homes.

A meaningful RBA report card would describe not only the children being served and their needs, but also the efficacy of the treatment received in out-of-state facilities. The extent to which treatment goals are met, the demonstrated improvements in behavior and functioning, the ability to assimilate upon discharge into their homes and schools, and

many other factors must be evaluated longitudinally in order to describe the success and cost-effectiveness of the treatment services Connecticut purchases.

We urge the state to spend DCF money more productively through specialized services that wrap around the child and the family and are based on individual need. To treat our children most effectively, Connecticut must strengthen community-based services using evidence-based practices, and serve children proactively before their needs become severe. This will help divert many children from costly inpatient hospitalization or residential placement.

When residential or hospital-level treatment is necessary, Connecticut must have the capacity to meet that need. An RBA assessment of the children Connecticut is currently not serving within our border is an important first step to developing our capacity to treating our most vulnerable children in their communities.

I fully support Senate Bill No. 846, An Act Concerning the Transfer of Educational Credits. This bill would help to ensure that all children who are admitted to one of DCF's institutions or facilities, and whose needs require that their education be provided within that facility by the Unified School District II, will have their educational credits transferred expeditiously when they are enrolled in a new school district. DCF policy already requires that prior to discharge from Unified School District II, the School District shall communicate with the child's parent or guardian or educational surrogate and with the Local Education Agency who will have responsibility for the child upon discharge. This bill can provide further quality assurance by requiring timeframes that the receiving School District will provide written notice of enrollment to DCF, that DCF shall transfer the child's educational records to the new school district, and that the new School District shall credit the student for all work received while enrolled in Unified School District II. The bill can provide additional support to important efforts to ensure educational stability for children in the care of DCF and our state-operated facilities.

I fully support House Bill No. 5041, An Act Concerning Cross-Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty. Frequently, animal abuse is part of a continuum of abuse within families. Often, animal abuse represents a way to coerce, intimidate, and further control child victims and force them into silence and fear. Studies of homes in which children are abused have found a significant rate of instances of abuse of animals in the home as well. [1] Cross-reporting among DCF employees and animal control officers would heighten awareness among child welfare and animal control professionals of this strong correlation and likely improve outcomes for both children and animals. This bill supports the critical need for prevention and early intervention related to child maltreatment and childhood behavioral and mental health issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

[1] *People and Animals, Kindness and Cruelty: Research Directions and Policy Implications*. Frank R. Ascione and Kenneth Shapiro, *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 569-587 (2009).