

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING

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**SB 1223
OPPOSE**

*Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli
Chief Child Protection Attorney*



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 concerning SB 1223, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESPOBSIBILITIES OF A PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF A CHILD CONVICTED AS DELINQUENT.

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. My office is also responsible for providing Guardians ad Litem in delinquency proceedings and also reimburses attorneys for representing individuals provided with counsel through discretionary "interest of justice" appointments who don't pay for their services. 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.

Section 1 of this bill requires the court to order a parent or guardian to attend court hearings related to delinquency after conviction, and makes failure to do so punishable as contempt of court. This is problematic for several reasons. First, the court should have the discretion to order that a parent attend proceedings as there are often hearings where parental participation may not be necessary. In cases where the parent is employed, attending multiple court hearings in addition to meetings with treatment providers, caseworkers, etc. could actually be detrimental to his or her ability to maintain employment.

Second, making failure to attend court hearings punishable by contempt will necessitate providing legal counsel to indigent parents due to the possibility of incarceration upon a finding of contempt. There is no provision in the bill concerning how the appointment of counsel would be handled under this circumstance. My office handles appointment of counsel for indigent child support obligors who are facing contempt and there simply is no funding to provide counsel for parents facing contempt.

In relation to Section 2, the notion of requiring parents, who cannot afford to pay for the costs of the state convicting their child of a delinquent act and ordering the child into custody or treatment, to perform community service strikes me as unconstitutional and would certainly require the provision of counsel before any such order could issue. The parent has not been convicted of any violation of law, yet they are essentially being punished for their child's act and for being poor.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Signorelli