

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children,

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children and am here today to testify in support of Raised bill 983, An Act Concerning Children Affected by Disaster or Terrorism.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to respond to September 11 and its impact on children. Our work focused on bioterrorism, mental health, training and safety. The language was studied and replicated by Congress through Senator Dodd. Congress created a National Commission on Children and Disaster with key recommendations to the President, just released.

Today in Connecticut we have one of the only child and crisis response committees in a homeland security department. Our work includes this legislation before you. We recognize that we need to take our work to the next step with intentional multi hazard evacuation plans for both schools and child care.

What has changed? More natural disasters including Hurricane Katrina, floods, and tornados.

We have also seen in our very own state plant explosions, worksite shootings and growing urban violence fueled by competing gangs.

Just recently, over 12 child care centers were harmed by roof damage and/or collapses resulting from our snow and ice storms with few pockets of warmth for melting.

Through federal disaster processes, there is a chance of reimbursement to cover costs of child care relocation and repair. But none of this is possible without a coordinated response in planning and in communications and training.

Agencies need to work together fast and urgently with clear and articulated goals and procedures for children.

After Katrina, our nation saw the devastation of a child care industry. There had been no attention to the impact of children without a place to go, the impact on parents as workers, the loss of safe facilities and the loss of jobs for the child care teachers. Now the federal Child Care Bureau is taking notice and calling on states to have disaster plans for children in both school and in childcare.

Katrina also highlighted the need for schools and child care to have family reunification plans during disasters; it was not until six months after Katrina that the last of over 5,000 children was reunited with family.

RB 983 includes the recommendations of Save the Children. This national organization has been at or studied the majority of natural and unnatural disasters and their impact on children, including Katrina. They have written recommended protocols and goals to help. These are embedded in this proposed statute.

I offer a few language changes to ensure alignment with the national recommendations. In particular, we need to ensure that the child plan is not a separate plan from the homeland security plan. By integrating the two, we will have greater access to professional awareness, a coordinated system and federal resources. I submit the recommended changes with this testimony.

We ask that you move this bill forward.

Thank you.

**AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY
DISASTER AND TERRORISM.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives
in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) On or before January 1, 2012, and annually thereafter, the Commissioner of Emergency Management and Homeland Security shall report to the General Assembly, in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes, on planning and activities for children and youth as part of homeland preparedness and emergency response planning for natural disasters, man-made disasters and terrorism. This report shall be part of the existing state emergency management and homeland security disaster plan and shall include provisions that address (1) the discrete health needs of children for purposes of bioterrorism preparedness and other public health emergencies, (2) public education and communications for families concerning public safety issues relating to disasters and terrorism, (3) training in safety and security measures and multi-hazard response plans for child care providers, school personnel and

personnel in before and after school programs, family homeless shelters and summer camps, and other child congregate care settings including group homes and juvenile justice centers (4) coordination of school health and mental health strategies, and (5) the plan developed pursuant to subsection (b)-(d) of this section.

(b) The Commissioner of Emergency Management and Homeland Security shall, within available appropriations and in consultation with the Commissioners of Social Services, Public Health, Children and Families, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Education, and the Commission on Children, develop a disaster response plan for protecting children during natural disasters, man-made disasters and terrorism. The plan may also be developed in consultation with parents, local emergency services and child care providers. The plan shall be appropriate for multiple hazards.

(c) The plan shall include, but not be limited to, a requirement that all schools and licensed or regulated child day care services and facilities, including family day care and centers, as defined in section 19a-77 of the

general statutes, shall have a written disaster response plan that addresses evacuation and safe removal of children to an alternate relocation site, (a safe location), a plan for notification of parents after (of) a disaster, a plan for reunification of parents with their children and (care for) an accounting of how children with special needs will be included in the emergency plan.

(d) The agencies involved in the above plan as enumerated in Section 1(b), shall update regulations, as needed, for child health and safety based on evolving best practices in the area of children and disasters.

--	--

