

Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing on Governor's Proposed Budget

Human Services

February 17th, 2012

Good evening Madam Chair(s) and members of the committee:

I am Alison Mundy, Director of Development of the Children's Law Center of Connecticut (CLC). The Children's Law Center provides legal representation and family mediation services to children living in poverty. These are children who, through no fault of their own, are embroiled in difficult, protracted divorce, custody and visitation disputes. Our cases typically involve allegations of mental illness, substance abuse, incarceration and domestic abuse. The children's homes, and lives, are in chaos. The organization provides this service in six family court jurisdictions, operates a free statewide legal help-line, and provides low-cost family mediation. The funding we receive from the State of Connecticut is critical to our operating budget.

CLC serves nearly 2,500 children annually through its combined programs. Our programs help parents living at or below the poverty line create and reach agreements out of court, saving both time and money for the family court system. Last year 85% of our cases ended in settlement or agreement. In cases that do go before a judge, final orders reflect our attorney's recommendations 99% of the time. Our Legal Representation program is currently operating at capacity and closed for intake, with a waiting list. We are often forced to turn down cases which are in dire need of our services. Over 60% of the referrals to our free legal help line come from DCF, 2-1-1 Infoline, court and the Office of the Child Advocate. By

providing these callers with information and answers to their questions, they are subsequently better prepared and navigate more efficiently when they do enter the court system.

Our budget figures show it costs CLC an average \$750 per child and \$1,982 per case to represent a child in family court, a bargain by any standard. In 2011, the Children's Law Center provided legal representation to 611 children. It is certain the burden to the state would be substantially greater without our intervention.

The **Children's Law Center** is currently under contract with the state for \$150,000 annually, in a line-item administered by the **DSS** through the **Children's Trust Fund**. This amount represents 16% of our organizational budget. Our contract was renewed for three years on July 1, 2011. Governor Malloy's current budget proposal eliminates this funding altogether.

Please restore funding for the Children's Law Center in full for 2012-2013, and honor our three-year contract.

Thank you.