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Testimony
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**HB 5395: AN ACT CONCERNING CUSTODY ORDERS FOR
DEPLOYED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES**

Representative Hennessy and Senator Leone, I want to thank you and the members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs for your interest in protecting the best interests of our armed forces and their children.

Last year, in the final days of the legislative session, the problem that this bill seeks to address was brought to my attention. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient time to act. Although, it was difficult to wait on this critical issue, you kindly offered to address the problem this session.

The mobilization and deployment of our armed forces, sometimes with little advance notice, is very stressful due to the disruptive effect on their families. Being separated from their children adds to the incredible pressure our deployed troops face. Many of these service members are parents to young children. The last thing a soldier needs is added anxiety of someone trying to take custody of their child(ren) while they are away and powerless to act.

The plight of female army sergeant who was deployed in Iraq was brought to my attention. At the time of her deployment, a temporary order was entered allowing the service woman's child to be in the care of her father. Unfortunately, the father took the opportunity to use

the fact of her deployment as a basis to modify custody of their five year old child.

Many states have enacted legislation prohibiting a non-deployed person from using the fact of deployment as a basis for custody modification. Connecticut is not among them.

The central element of this legislation is to insure that a court cannot enter into a final order modifying parental rights due to deployment.

The courts can order a temporary modification, if necessary. Upon their return of a deployed parent may then apply to change the order.

It is also in the best interest of the child for there to be as much contact as feasible when the parent is absent due to military orders that results in extended active service, especially outside of the state due to deployment. The legislation provides for insuring contact by phone or email.

Parents who serve in the military face many challenges – one of them should not be worrying about their relationships with their children. As America's military commitments in Afghanistan and around the world persist, it is important that we address the family issues which military parents face.

I want to thank you again for considering this very important issue.