



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 22, 2013
REGARDING PROPOSED H.B. No. 6353
AN ACT CONCERNING STATE BUDGET REFORM**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Abby Anderson and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit organization working to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and advocating a safe, effective and fair system for those involved. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Alliance is opposed to the proposed changes to the budget-setting processes for the Office of Government Accountability, to the extent they would negatively affect the autonomy of the Office of the Child Advocate. The proposed changes would give appropriations authority to the Executive Administrator within the Executive Branch. This change would seriously threaten the independence of the Office of the Child Advocate, which is essential for it to successfully fulfill its mission and role as a watchdog for children in our state.

Simply put, successful fulfillment of the Office of the Child Advocate's statutory mandate requires insulation from governmental influence. Among other things, its mandate is to protect children by evaluating service delivery, investigating complaints, and reviewing facilities, *of state agencies or agency-funded entities* that are serving our most vulnerable children: those in foster care, residential facilities, with special health care needs, in the justice system, and so on.

In order to meet its statutory mandate, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) must at times point out problems and deficiencies in how state systems, including those within the executive branch, operate with regard to children's services, and propose individual or systemic changes. For example, it has long focused on and is currently strongly advocating within the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for improving conditions of care in its facilities, including reduction of harmful measures such as restraint and seclusion of children. The office has urged the State Department of Education (SDE) to improve schools' responses to children with behavioral health needs, and advocates for young adult-specific policies and programming within the Department of Correction (DOC). In addition, the OCA also frequently identifies or is asked to investigate child/family problem practices or policy issues within or between these and other Departments, including Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Developmental Services (DDS) and Social Services (DSS).

Thank you for your consideration, in working to protect OCA's ability to continue to serve as one of the state's most effective tools for safeguarding and improving the wellbeing of our children.

Alliance member organizations: AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI Children's Community Programs, Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI-CT and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children