

Testimony for Appropriations Committee Public Hearing, March 22, 2013  
HB 6354

Dear Senator Walker, Representative Harp, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I write to urge you to REJECT the proposed consolidation of the five legislative commissions as included in HB 6354, *An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning the General Government*. **I ask you instead to maintain the independence of each of the five legislative commissions with funding at the current level.**

I have served as a commissioner on the Commission on Children (COC) since 2003. Over the course of the past decade I have come to know firsthand what a brilliant strategist and effective Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman is. The COC staff comprises a highly productive and efficient team which works tirelessly and with commitment for the children and youth of this state. They lead the state and the nation in best practice for children.

Each of the five commissions functions with few employees and small budgets. The work they accomplish individually, as well as collectively, is remarkable. They are a bargain. When you factor in the thousands of collective hours of volunteer time given by their associated volunteer commissioners, their low-cost value rises. Secretary of State Denise Merrill now, and previously as a legislator, has advocated for more civic involvement in this state. The commissions provide a platform for worthwhile and effective civic engagement. Furthermore, the COC's Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) creates an important opportunity for Connecticut residents, many of them minorities, to become active participants in the democratic process.

The list of COC accomplishments is long. Others have detailed the list for you. I will simply highlight a few initiatives that I find particularly meaningful; our involvement last year regarding literacy reforms and increasing daily physical exercise in an *Act Concerning Educational Reform (P.A. 12 - 116)*, continued efforts on *School Bullying (PA 11-232)*, *Children in the Recession (P.A. 10 -133)* and *The Child Poverty Reduction Law (P.A. 04-238)*, and lastly the *Investment in Prevention (P.A. 06-179)*

COC Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman has repeatedly and rightly reminded you of the high number of dollars the COC brings into the state. This alone ought to argue winningly for the preservation of the COC. How many state organizations bring in more money than they cost the state, and can then further demonstrate, with measurable outcomes, the successful use of these added dollars?

The five commissions are low budget, work-intensive organizations which function remarkably well with a combination of paid staff complemented by dedicated volunteers. Each of the target groups that the commissions represent need and deserve the specific initiatives and dollars devoted to them. It is in the best interest of this state to continue to

invest in the five commissions as currently funded and to maintain them as separate entities which can best address the needs of their respective communities, while it making it possible for them to work collaboratively when appropriate.

Curiously, the Governor's own "*An Act Concerning Next Generation Connecticut*" (SB 840) makes a case for the current and future role of the commissions. If our minority youth and our female youth are to have a place at the rich STEM educational table that the governor prepares to set, then it would seem particularly foolish and unproductive to underfund and consolidate the commissions at this time. I note that LPRAC itself raises the funds for the college scholarships it provides to members of the Hispanic community. If all young people in Connecticut are to have a chance to participate in the Governor's bold educational initiative, then surely we need to address even more seriously the early educational, social, and health needs of *all* of Connecticut's young people. The commissions do just that. They work synergistically in ensuring a brighter economic future for this state – one which needs to include all of our state's demographics.

Sincerely,

Alison Hilding  
17 Southwood Road  
Storrs, CT 06268