

March 4, 2013

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives of the Committee on Children:

I am Dr. Judith Wyman Kelly, a graduate student in policy at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. My husband and I live in West Hartford with our two daughters.

Several classmates and I are here today in support of children. Specifically, I am testifying in support of H.R. 11, the resolution to urge Congress to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and H.B. #6499, "An Act Concerning The Results-Based Accountability Assessment Program and Children's Rights." I strongly urge you to support this resolution and this bill.

Some might wonder why a United Nations (U.N.) treaty has any relevance to what happens at the state level, or why state actions bear any significance to U.N. treaties. Actually, the relationship is critical as well as reciprocal.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the CRC, was adopted by the U.N. in 1989. Although it was signed by the United States in 1995, it has yet to be ratified by our great country. It is shocking to me as a mother, an aunt, and an American citizen that my homeland is one of only three countries in the world not to ratify a document that states the obvious: children are not possessions, but are people who have rights just like the rest of us.

State action is crucial, as our system of federalism is one reason for the lack of ratification. Unless enough states show official support of the CRC, Congress will listen more closely to those small, but vocal states that oppose it. Therefore, by urging Congress to ratify the CRC, Connecticut can become an important advocate for children around the world, in the U.S., and most of all in our own state. In this case our collective Connecticut state voice is stronger than any individual voice could be.

But more importantly, ratification or not, Connecticut must be guided by the values and rights espoused in the CRC. It serves as a moral compass which heralds all that children are entitled to, but too often do not receive: economic, social, and cultural rights such as "food, clothing, shelter, health care and education as well as freedom from abuse, neglect,

exploitation and discrimination.”<sup>1</sup> Surely these are values that we, as citizens of Connecticut and residents of the world, hold to be true.

Yet unfortunately, many of Connecticut’s children do not benefit from such rights. For example:

- In Hartford, child poverty is a staggering 48%, and in Bridgeport it is 40%.<sup>2</sup>
- In Connecticut a child is abused or neglected every 52 minutes.<sup>3</sup>
- In Connecticut every two days, a child dies before his or her first birthday.<sup>4</sup>

As Americans, we must support the Convention on the Rights of the Child and press Congress to do the same. We must also provide the rights so powerfully voiced in this Convention to our own children here in our own state of Connecticut.

I thank you for hearing my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. No. 11. (2013, January). Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/TOB/H/2013HR-00011-R00-HB.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Merritt.G. (2012, September 21). “U.S. Census: More Connecticut families and children living below poverty level.” Retrieved March 4, 2103 from <http://ctmirror.com/story/17533/us-census-more-connecticut-families-and-children-living-below-poverty-level>

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Defense Fund, Children in Connecticut (2012). Retrieved March 3, 2013 from: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/state-data-repository/cits/2012/2012-connecticut-children-in-the-states.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.