



CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND COUNCIL

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and distinguished members of the Children's Committee, I am Laura Amenta, Chair of The Children's Trust Fund Council. I thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to you today regarding

Proposed S.B. No. 650 AN ACT CREATING A PARENTS' SUPPORT HOT LINE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN EXHIBITING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES.

The Challenge

As a nation, we face two major challenges in helping our children with developmental problems.

First, children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems are too often eluding early detection, which is the cornerstone to addressing such issues effectively.

Second, even when at-risk children are identified, families often cannot find the programs and services their children most need. Quality programs do exist to help them, but significant barriers keep families from connecting with resources. We need to remove these barriers.

The Solution - Help Me Grow

In Connecticut and Nationwide, there is a system called *Help Me Grow* that tackles both challenges.

The *Help Me Grow* model connects families with concerns for their children's development and behavior to appropriate, community based programs and services.

A core component of the *Help Me Grow* model is a centralized hot line for connecting children and their families to services and care coordination. In Connecticut, the United Way 211 info-line is the centralized telephone access point. I want to bring to your attention that this hot line already exists and that creation of another hotline would be expensive and duplicative.

The 211 call center serves as the "go-to" place for parents, family members, child health care providers, child care providers, schools and other professionals seeking information, support, and referrals for children.

Help Me Grow offers a resoundingly successful model of collaboration across sectors, to improve early detection. Rigorous data collection allows for continuous quality improvement while also demonstrating the system's success. For example since 2002, 85% of children and families referred to Connecticut's *Help Me Grow* have been successfully connected with community-based programs and services. Each year, Connecticut's program tracks the physical, social and emotional development of more than 2,500 young children through their first five years of life and connects these children to more than 3,000 services. These are children who don't meet the eligibility for *Birth to Three*.

Help Me Grow is a model - with a proven track record - that assists states in identifying at-risk children, and then helps families find those quality programs, from early care to education and family support. While Connecticut legislature provided the money to pilot the very first *Help Me Grow* system, this program is now being replicated in 16 states with plans to expand nationwide.

Instead of a new hotline...

Rather than create a new hotline, Connecticut needs to build on the existing model. One idea is to build on the capacity of Child Development 211 Infoline of United Way in conjunction with *Help Me Grow*, by enhancing staffing to field calls by parents seeking emotional support for dealing with a child behavioral problems. Another is to preserve full funding for *Help Me Grow*.

In removing the barriers that families typically encounter as they seek care for children, difficulties are identified early before they grow into more serious problems that threaten a child's future and require more expensive and intensive interventions. The end result is better outcomes for our children, our families, and our communities.