

Center for *Children's* Advocacy

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 654, AN ACT CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID PROGRAM FOR PARENTS, WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENTS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMATIC STRESS ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR AND ABILITY TO LEARN.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

The Center for Children's Advocacy **supports** raised bill No. 654 to develop a mental health first aid program for parents in order to enhance their ability to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness in their children and the community in general. In addition, the Center urges this committee to address the impact of traumatic stress on children's behavior and their ability to learn by **amending section (d) to include an objective that includes recognition of the impact of traumatic stress on children's behavior and learning.**

Traumatic stress resulting from the exposure to gun violence, domestic violence or child abuse can have a significant impact on a child's behavior and his/her ability to learn. In order to effectively address the impact of traumatic stress on behavior and learning, parents, students and school professionals need an embedded system of support that recognizes the signs of traumatic stress and how to best support children in their healing process.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) should ensure that the selected online or community training program is infused with information regarding trauma informed theory, interventions and practice. The training program should address how a history of trauma can impact the child's behavior and his/her ability to make academic progress including, but not limited to, whether the child's behavior makes her/him unavailable for learning. The program should also inform parents of the possibility that a child experiencing post traumatic stress may need to be referred for special education evaluations pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 10-76(d) and/or availability of reasonable accommodations pursuant to § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

We strongly urge you to consider the proposed amendments in order to ensure that parents of children impacted by traumatic stress have the information they need in order to help their children overcome barriers accessing education and related services.

Respectfully submitted,

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