



United Way of Connecticut

2-1-1

**Children Committee Public Hearing
February 14, 2013**

Testimony Presented by United Way of Connecticut

My name is Richard Porth. I serve as the CEO of United Way of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on:

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

Proposed S.B. No. 169 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ASSESSMENT AND DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN

We support the need for parents to access mental health services via an information and referral line, and would like to suggest that the Child Development Infoline (CDI), a specialized call center of United Way of Connecticut 2-1-1 and access point for Help Me Grow, together with DCF's Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Service (EMPS) for youth, which is accessed through 2-1-1, can serve this function.

Rather than creating a new line, we respectfully suggest that building on the state's existing infrastructure through Help Me Grow and EMPS, both of which are already known to parents and families, physicians, and other community and mental health providers, would be more efficient and cost effective.

Working with the Department of Children and Families, United Way 2-1-1 serves as the state's primary access point for the Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Service for youth, which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to connect parents/caregivers with trained counselors when children are experiencing a behavioral crisis.

Complementing this emergency service, Child Development Infoline provides a free and confidential service and a safe environment for callers to discuss concerns and identify longer-term solutions regarding a child's health, development or behavior. CDI is staffed by bilingual care coordinators who have degrees and a background in child development. The state's Help Me Grow Program is accessed through CDI and was designed to improve early detection of developmental or behavioral problems and to help families connect to community based programs that can help address those issues. Help Me Grow is a model that was designed in Connecticut and is currently being replicated in 16 states. Last year, over 2,000 calls were made to Help Me Grow/CDI by parents and families, pediatricians and other providers about a child's learning, behavior and development. CDI connects families to many of the state's behavioral health related services, including the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership, Child FIRST, the Behavioral Health Partnership, Child Guidance Clinics, voluntary services through DCF including EMPS, and family support and advocacy programs, such as NAMI and FAVOR.

DCF's Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Service is a mobile intervention service for children and adolescents experiencing a behavioral or mental health crisis, which is accessed by calling 2-1-1, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The program involves a team of nearly 150 trained mental health professionals across the state that can respond immediately by phone or face to face within 45 minutes when a child is experiencing a behavioral or emotional crisis. The purpose of this program is to serve children in their homes and communities, reduce the number of visits to hospital ER's, and divert them from hospitalization if a lower level of care is a safe, effective alternative.

EMPS and Help Me Grow are both available under the 2-1-1 umbrella. Together, they provide a range of emergency and longer-term behavioral health services which are already in place and serving Connecticut youth and their families. But more can be done to increase their capacity and to serve more people. Please consider building on these assets to strengthen support for parents of children exhibiting behavioral health issues.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you on this crucial issue.