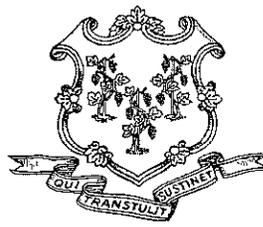


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Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee on Children. I am here to testify in support of SB 303 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN EXPOSED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE.

As many of you know, last year in Connecticut, six children were present in the home when their mothers – Lori Gellatly, Kyla Ryng and Kiromy Fontanez – were fatally shot. Some of these children witnessed their mothers' deaths.

Following these terrible murders, the Child Advocate and the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) formed a workgroup to look at the issue of children and youth exposed to domestic violence. The "Improving Outcomes for Children Exposed to Family Violence" workgroup just released a report which notes the following facts about domestic violence:

- Half of households with domestic violence are homes with children.
- Most of these children are under five years old.
- Most of these households have multiple incidents.
- 75% of families involved with child protective services have domestic violence occurring in the home.

The report also describes the adverse effects of childhood exposure to family violence:

"...[I]ntimate partner violence within families puts children at high risk for severe and potentially lifelong problems with physical health, mental health, and school and peer relationships as well as disruptive behavior. Witnessing or living with domestic or intimate partner violence often burdens children with a sense of loss or profound guilt and shame because of their mistaken assumption that they should have intervened or prevented the violence or, tragically, that they caused the violence."

Even though we know about the significant adverse effects of children's exposure to domestic violence, Connecticut has no uniform state policy to address the issue of properly responding to and caring for children who have been witnesses to domestic violence. Senate Bill 303 would establish a task force, akin to the Family Violence Model Policy Governing Council, with the purpose of 1) evaluating all existing policies related to responding to minors exposed to family violence, and 2) developing a statewide model policy for the Department of Children and Families and its contractors, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and its contractors, healthcare professionals, guardians at litem, attorneys for minor children, law enforcement and the Judicial Branch.

It is my sincere hope that this task force will ensure that state policy and practice offers effective, evidence-based models for strong intervention and prevention remedies for children and youth exposed to family violence.