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Testimony to the Joint Committee on Children
SB 312 An Act Concerning The Protection Of Particularly Vulnerable Children

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Representative Toni Walker, representing the 93rd district in New Haven.

I am submitting testimony in support of SB 312, which seeks to institute policies and procedures to prevent fatalities in children ages birth to three years. Infants and toddlers are a high-risk population for abuse and neglect, many of whom are not adequately served by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and other child protection agencies. At the state and national level, nearly eighty percent of child fatalities in the birth to three age bracket are a result of such negligence.

A July 31, 2014 Child Fatality Report made by the Office of the Child Advocate indicated that out of eighty-two child deaths, thirty-eight children had suffered non-natural deaths in 2013 in the State of Connecticut. Eighteen of those thirty-eight non-natural deaths had cases open with DCF, cases closed with DCF in the last six months, or cases closed with DCF in the last year. It is alarming that children may die from abuse or neglect before their cases have come to DCF, yet DCF's involvement is not necessarily enough to prevent fatalities. It is critical that these fatalities be extensively reviewed for prevention purposes and to better understand risk factors.

The Committee on Children is a critical partner in developing a strategic plan for DCF and state agencies' responses to abused and neglected children in the birth to three age category. I ask the Committee to draft a bill that will develop a DCF-child protective services practice model that will address the high-risk nature of the birth to three population and preventable fatalities. This model will include the following procedures:

1. Increase visitation standards and direct supervision, as a measure of quality assurance, for case staff members
2. Address protocols for case contacts, risk assessment, and hotline procedures
3. Develop a team of internal and external experts to consult and enforce the protocol of the child protective services practice model
4. Enable progress monitoring to study the efficacy of the practice model
5. Allow for more rigorous examination of preventable child fatalities to inform prevention strategies
6. Increase uniformity of standards for mal-treatment to prevent under-reporting of such cases in the State of Connecticut.

I appreciate the initiatives undertaken by DCF in 2014 to reduce prevent infant and toddler mortality due to abuse and neglect, such as a "safe-sleep" practice guide, more supportive measures for the hotline to adequately detect child abuse at the earliest stages, and a renewed incentive to address the needs and support of high-risk families. I feel that the implementation of this practice model will help lower the number of preventable deaths in the birth to three age bracket, a critical issue facing high-risk youth in the State of Connecticut.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on this important bill.

Thank you.



Representative Toni Walker