

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

Testimony of Center for Children's Advocacy In Support of Senate Bill 312: An Act Concerning the Protection of Particularly Vulnerable Children and Senate Bill 310: An Act Strengthening Child Fatality Review Procedures

Committee on Children
February 5, 2015

Submitted by Alexandra Dufresne, Attorney, Child Abuse Project, Center for Children's Advocacy; Member, Connecticut Fatality Review Panel

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am a Staff Attorney in the Child Abuse Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy, where I am appointed by the Juvenile Court in Hartford to represent children -- including many infants and toddlers -- in child protection proceedings. Since January 2013, I have also served as a member of Connecticut's Child Fatality Review Panel. I submit this testimony on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, along with my Op-Ed in the *Hartford Courant* on these issues.

We support Senate Bills 312 and 310 for the following reasons:

1. *In 2013 and 2014, an alarming large number of young children in Connecticut died from preventable causes. The majority of these children were six months or younger.*
2. *Recent studies by the Department of Children and Families and the Office of the Child Advocate have concluded that improvements to state policies and practices for at-risk infants and toddlers would save lives.¹ Key areas identified for improvement include:*
 - a. *Timely and accurate risk assessments;*
 - b. *Timely and consistent determinations of whether to file neglect petitions in juvenile court;*
 - c. *Sufficient visitation between caseworkers and parents;*
 - d. *Timely and accurate assessment of parents' needs;*
 - e. *Timely and appropriate in-home services;*
 - f. *Effective counseling regarding safe sleep practices.*
3. *Because data show that children in Connecticut are at highest risk of dying during their first three years of life-- in particular, their first six months--our expectations for what constitutes "timely" should be adjusted. Delays that may be reasonable for*



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adults are dangerous for high-risk infants and toddlers. Similarly, because this relatively small window of time is so crucial in terms of death prevention, we should be prepared to invest considerable energy and resources into getting the policies, procedures, and services for these children just right. This requires extensive and continuous collaboration between the many agencies with expertise and expertise in this area. In other words, in high-risk cases, for the first six months after a baby is born, our baseline for what constitutes a "normal" or appropriate" or even "possible" community and governmental response should be reconceptualized.

4. *In light of the importance of keeping high-risk infants and toddlers safe, we need all of the policy tools provided by SB 312 and 310, from extensive interagency collaboration to comprehensive and independent investigations and annual public hearings. We also need protocols for consistent data collection and reporting, so that we can know in future years whether our initiatives designed to save children's lives have worked.*

For the reasons stated above, we support Senate Bills 312 and 310. We thank the members of the committee for their dedication to protecting the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Respectfully Submitted,



Alexandra Dufresne, Staff Attorney
Child Abuse Project

AD/amt

Attachment