



**Committee on Children Public Hearing
February 24, 2015**

**Testimony on SB 841 AAC the Implementation of a Comprehensive Children's Mental,
Emotional, and Behavioral Health Plan**

Submitted by Richard Porth, United Way of Connecticut

My name is Richard Porth and I serve as CEO of United Way of Connecticut. This testimony is in support of SB 841, An Act Concerning the Implementation of a Comprehensive Children's Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan.

We applaud state leaders for the ongoing efforts to improve access for children to behavioral health services and, in particular, for the Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan submitted on October 1, 2014. Implementation of this plan will guide further progress in Connecticut toward meeting children's behavioral health needs and reducing the long-term negative impact of behavioral health issues on children. Under the leadership of the Department of Children and Families and with the excellent support of the Child Health and Development Institute, we now have a thoughtful and comprehensive plan for children's behavioral health.

Through United Way of Connecticut's 2-1-1 health and human services contact center and our Child Development Infoline, United Way of Connecticut knows first-hand of the importance of addressing children's behavioral health needs. In FY14, 2-1-1 recorded 35,689 requests for outpatient mental health services. In fact, in FY14 accessing mental health services was the third most prevalent reason people across the state called 2-1-1, after housing/shelter and utility and heating assistance. In addition, 2-1-1 handled 17,697 calls while serving as the entry point for the Department of Children and Families' Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services for children and youth. But 2-1-1 also fielded thousands of calls and requests over helplines, suicide prevention hotlines, domestic violence hotlines, general counseling services, and for substance abuse services. Of course, many of these calls also impacted children across the state.

Connecticut residents in the thousands have turned to 2-1-1 for years now, for crisis intervention and to learn about and access a multitude of behavioral health and substance abuse services provided by government agencies and non-profits. They do it because the 2-1-1 call in number is easy to remember no matter what the nature of their health and human service need is and because 2-1-1 works hard all year to make sure that our database of health and human services is accurate and up to date.

Child Development Infoline is a specialized service under the 2-1-1 umbrella which provides access to a coordinated, statewide system of early detection of children at risk for adverse developmental and behavioral outcomes along with care coordination for these children and their families to facilitate access to services and supports to address identified needs. This is achieved in CDI by serving as the access point for the state's Help Me Grow program.

This past year, CDI's Help Me Grow program greatly expanded access to the nationally respected Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) by making this tool, which helps parents and providers to monitor children's developmental progress, available online. Child Development Infoline will soon provide the ASQ Social/Emotional assessment tool online as well. The ASQ empowers parents by providing guidance on monitoring their children's progress and responding when a developmental or behavioral need may arise. During the past year, over four thousand families and providers took advantage of the ASQ provided by Help Me Grow. (Parenthetically, the recent SFY 16-17 budget proposed by the Governor eliminates Help Me Grow funding (\$331,000), which we hope will be reinstated before the final budget is adopted.)

We note that SB 841 recommends including a representative on the Children's Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Plan Implementation Advisory Board from United Way of Connecticut's 2-1-1 program. We would be honored to serve on the Implementation Advisory Board. And, we pledge to build on the work we are already doing to strengthen access to behavioral health services for children in support of the work outlined in SB 841.