



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



**Testimony before the Public Safety and Security Committee on H.B. No. 6910
Submitted by Mary Kate Lowndes, Director of Development and Special Initiatives
Connecticut Commission on Children
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Senator Larson, Representative Dargan, and Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

My name is Mary Kate Lowndes. I am the Director of Development and Special Initiatives for the Commission on Children. I am here to express the Commission's support of Raised H.B. No. 6910, *An Act Concerning Notification by Law Enforcement Agencies to Day Care Centers*.

The State of Connecticut has done much work to improve the safety and security of our state's children. Training of day care providers in disaster preparedness and response has been ongoing over the past several years, predominantly through CT Charters-A-Course, which is now a part of the Office of Early Childhood. Several hundred day care providers have received this training. DPH's Child Care Licensing Department, now also a part of the Office of Early Childhood, has also trained child care providers.

The statewide Child Emergency Preparedness Committee, which I Co-Chair, focuses on spreading best practices and defining gaps in child emergency preparedness. The Committee has a) spread awareness of the emergency preparedness trainings, b) increased the conscious factoring in of children into state and local disaster planning, c) linked United Way 211 Child Care with state, regional and local emergency management personnel, d) developed injects for the Governor's statewide emergency exercise to drive localities to resources and planning vis-à-vis children, e) distributed a flip chart to day care providers throughout the state in English and Spanish on response to various disasters, f) supported the development of a locality-based disaster planning training by a local emergency management director that intentionally links emergency response personnel and day care providers, and g) serves as a voice for children at the statewide DEMHS advisory board, to drive inclusion of children into the state's disaster preparedness and response planning. DEMHS also conducts a myriad of activities to enhance school-based disaster preparedness and response.

A nut we have not been able to crack, however, is widespread, direct linkage between local emergency management and response personnel (fire, police, emergency management) and day care providers. Somehow, the majority of communities in our state still do not actively wrap local day cares into their planning, nor into their emergency messaging. Raised H.B. No. 6910 would drive a much-needed change to this gap in our state.

The data on day care providers is readily available. United Way 211 Child Care has a website (<http://www.211.childcare.org>) that lists day care providers for communities across our state. This information is available in an interactive map or list format. It is continuously updated by United Way 211 Child Care, and they are in constant communication with day care providers throughout our state. They have offered to provide a quarterly electronic update of day care providers to emergency management personnel throughout our state, at no charge.

There are a few challenges. One is that localities use a variety of reverse 911/emergency notification systems. So unfortunately it is not a simple interface of United Way 211 Child Care with one corresponding system on the side of emergency management. Perhaps federal homeland security grant funding could be utilized to address this system gap. Another is that, in smaller communities, the emergency response and management personnel are often part-time and wear many hats. A system will need to be designed that is not costly in human resources on data input. These challenges pale to the current lack of connection to child care settings in a shooting, storm or caved rooftop. I note them to give the full picture of the issue.

On the bill's provision for day care centers to submit their contact information to the local police, the Commission recommends this item be added to the list of requirements for day care licensure, to further increase the numbers of day care providers who reach out to their local police department/state police troop.

The proposed legislation puts the responsibility on both the child care provider – to submit their contact information to local police – and on the local police, to ensure they include day care centers in notifications of nearby emergencies. We support the inclusion of family day care providers as well as child day care centers.

It is as critical that the day time locations of our youngest children receive the same notifications as do our schools. To leave them out is to needlessly endanger our youngest children, their caregivers, and their families. They are as important a piece of the emergency notification and disaster planning puzzle as are the rest of us.

Thank you.