

Dear Appropriations Committee:

I have written to express how Governor Malloy's proposed budget cut to the probate court system may increase costs to the State. Such a cut no doubt would impact the Court's ability to effectively service the community in particular the services offered to Connecticut guardians via the Probate Court Officer Program.

Probate Court Officers are Master's level clinical professionals with expertise in psycho-social assessment, individual/family/ group counseling, facilitation, crisis intervention, child welfare, referral and engagement along with legal knowledge of children's matters adjudicated in the Probate Court. Paramount to the Program's goal is family case plan development via a case conference process in which a family is guided in development of a family plan to improve the family's knowledge, skills, and ability to successfully meet their own needs and the needs of the children in their care.

I ask that you consider some ways that this Program is cost-saving to the State:

- Reduces the number of children per month entering the State foster care system by supporting families in creating their own solutions before there is a need for DCF involvement;
- Decreases the utilization of State resources for incidences of abuse and/or neglect due to early intervention;
- Shortens the episodes of care related to mental health services for children/families due to early intervention resulting in better long-term outcomes for children;
- Increases the tracking of the community service provision offered to children and families via an approach that facilitates the collaboration of providers. Result: decrease in duplicity of service provision and/or fosters targeted service provision;
- Expedites the Court process by creating an interdisciplinary approach to child protection by merging the social work and legal fields;
- Expedites the Court process by involving birth parents, extended family members, familial supports, providers, and other interested parties in the planning/ decision-making process by family-driven case conferencing versus State (DCF)-driven case conferencing. Result: increases the likelihood of family autonomy.

Respectfully,

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