March 2, 2015 | Appropriations Committee Testimony – CT General Assembly
Governor's Bill No. 949: An Act Concerning Data Security and Agency Effectiveness
Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections

Good Afternoon, Representative Jutila, Senator McLoughlin, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Dr. Anne Farrell. I live in Danbury and am a faculty member in Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Connecticut where I also Direct the Center for Applied Research in Human Development. The mission of the Center is to develop and test interventions to improve quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. In particular, we aim to improve outcomes for marginalized populations by informing and evaluating interventions intended for public benefit. The Center partners with state and federal agencies, community non-profits, and educators to design, implement, and monitor interventions to prevent and reduce problems and improve outcomes. We are currently collaborating with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the State Department of Education, the Court Services Support Division, The Office of Policy and Management, The Children's Trust Fund, and The Office of Early Childhood. I am here to indicate our support for the Bill. I have three main points to convey.

First, it is essential that citizens experience full protection and confidentiality as well as secure access to their records. High-quality data privacy policies enable the State to meet its legal, technical, and moral obligation to safeguard citizen data as well as enabling citizens to access their own data. For example, Utah has developed a secure "online student backpack" that enables families to have ongoing access to education records; this approach could be made available through all publicly funded services.

Second, efficient, reliable, prompt, and secure access to interagency data is necessary in order to study and improve programs and services. In the private sector, stakeholders use data strategically. In the public sector, stakeholders are often forced to make decisions based on anecdote and educated guess because we lack access to high-quality information. CT has committed to data sharing and has made notable progress, however, it lacks 3 of 10 critical actions recommended by the Data Quality Campaign: (1) linked data systems, (2) timely, role-based access to data, and (3) implementation of policies and practices to build access.

We underscore the obligation for publicly funded programs to undergo rigorous, transparent evaluation and note that it is hampered by silo-ed data systems. Linked access to administrative data for the purposes of evaluation does *not* require the use of protected or personally identifiable information; in fact, researchers tend to *prefer* de-identified data. Other States, including Virginia, have secure, linked, longitudinal data systems that are producing troves of valuable information, such as return on investment of workforce development efforts, post-completion wages of college graduates, and teacher training outcomes. The Data Quality Campaign reports that CT is one of 13 states that have not implemented all 10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. Colorado, widely cited as a model for use of longitudinal, de-identified data, enacted legislation that required State agencies to develop processes for protecting, requesting, and sharing data.

Why is this legislation needed? The silo-ed systems in our State require program evaluators to approach Executive Agencies individually to request data. The agencies consider requests independently and "merge" datasets by using primary fields to match cases. This time-consuming and cumbersome process slows considerably our access to actionable data. For example, I am the Principal Investigator on a federally funded evaluation of CT's Housing and Child Welfare Project, Supportive Housing for Families. The project is a collaboration of DCF and The Connection, Inc. and has garnered national attention as a model. We wish to determine whether the new intervention is efficient in helping families over the long run. Specifically, we look to understand

the per unit transactional costs incurred by government agencies that serve clients in the project to appraise whether the costs support the benefits to families and whether they result in cost savings over the long run. A full appraisal of costs and savings requires data from DCF, Department of Social Services, the Department of Housing, and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. Separate requests across all of these agencies would require a very significant effort. This Bill would enable consideration of a single request rather than five or more and allow a uniform review of the request at the administrative level.

Finally, we endorse the requirement for interagency memoranda of agreement and further recommend stakeholder engagement in the MOA and responses to data sharing requests. We respectfully suggest the constellation of a review panel composed of policymakers, State agency leaders, consumers, researchers, and representatives of community agencies. It is critical that review of data sharing requests be efficient as well as maintaining security and integrity, and that access be granted only to qualified personnel who present rigorous plans for data management and the evaluation of policies and programs.

I and my colleagues will be pleased to make ourselves available to the Committee as consideration of this Bill and these processes moves forward. Thank you.

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