

# Committee on Children Public Testimony

## S.B. #306 – AA Establishing an Independent Department of Children and Families Ombudsman

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I am a married parent with three children. All are adopted. All are diagnosed with complex trauma and/or adoption/ attachment disruption-rooted conditions. My 10-year old daughter suffers from several conditions that present in a variety of troubling, unstable ways. Her symptoms cycle seasonally, and are triggered by many unpredictable environmental, social, emotional and psychological factors that can render her unsafe to herself and others; and she is medicated to help maintain her behaviors.

In my experience with the Department of Children and Families – pursuing voluntary services and appropriate, condition informed, clinician recommended models of care and supports; my family and my daughter were threatened, humiliated, lied to, denied access to care and then, accused of parental wrong doing, viewed through a ‘protective’ lens, and processed in that image. This, instead of receiving respectful, responsive, compassionate access to care and services as requested. (2011: Initial denial was said to be rooted in deep funding cuts.)

In July 2012, my psychologically disturbed child, who was in DCF custody under an Order of Temporary Custody, an OTC that was so ordered based on fabricated, subjective and highly exaggerated and uninformed DCF worker testimony, was lost multiple times and for hours at a time, while in her 4<sup>th</sup> foster placement. It was then, during her heightened trigger period, when she was found lying in a city street intersection, in a fetal position, talking about wanting to die (to be with her diseased biological mother again). I learned of the incident during my daughter’s weekly therapy session, which included her therapist, my daughter, the foster caregiver and myself. The details of the incident were quite scary to all in the room.

A few days later, I asked the DCF caseworker about the incident. The caseworker first denied it occurred. Then, when denial was no longer an option, she smirked and trivialized it as insignificant, unimportant and, stated that my daughter didn't really want to die so therefore, it was nothing, and laughed. My daughter did not receive proper psychiatric care following the incident and was returned to the foster placement that had failed on three separate occasions to keep her properly supervised.

Out of concern for my daughter safety and well-being, I filed a complaint with the Department's Ombudsman office. The complaint was filed in writing and detailed the troubling and dangerous situation that had occurred. The representative assigned to respond to me was smug, condescending, minimized my allegations and seemed bias towards the Department's position and account of the incident. I was not treated with respect and I was not received as credible. I was accused of making the whole thing up and told that my allegations were significant and subjective; and asked if I understood what I was stating. I was dismissed with swift ease and the matter received little attention. I also complained directly to the DCF regional director. My complaint was investigated. The investigation team stated that they agreed with my position and then, the matter was dropped.

Further, during that same time period, my daughter's therapist, as a court mandated reporter, filed a complaint of physical abuse against my daughter's foster care provider. That complaint was not properly investigated. The therapist was never contacted as part of an investigation effort and the matter was quickly (45-days) resolved as unsubstantiated. From the time the therapist's complaint was filed, my daughter's foster caregiver discontinued detailed daily communication with her about my daughter's emotional and behavioral issues and incidents.

It is my position that Department conduct complaints would be considered credible, regarded as important and pressing, and warrant actual and thorough investigation if the DCF ombudsman office was not affiliated, administered, operated, housed or in any way directly managed by the Department of Children and Families. Separating ombudsman is one of many necessary steps to bring accountability and employee personal action responsibility to the DCF.