

# Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

## Testimony of Center for Children's Advocacy In Support of Senate Bill 1008, An Act Establishing an Infant and Toddler Services Board

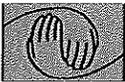
Committee on Children  
March 3, 2015

Submitted by Alexandra Dufresne, Attorney, Child Abuse Project, Center for Children's Advocacy; Member, Connecticut's Child Fatality Review Panel

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am a Staff Attorney in the Child Abuse Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy, a nonprofit law firm dedicated to protecting the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children. My colleagues and I are appointed by the Juvenile Court in Hartford to represent children -- including many infants and toddlers -- in child protection proceedings. In addition, I serve on Connecticut's Child Fatality Review Panel, which reviews the deaths of many infants and toddlers each year. I am also a member of Prevention Partners for Children, a public-private partnership charged with developing strong policies to prevent child abuse. Our office has focused intensely on the legal needs of Connecticut's most vulnerable infants and toddlers in recent years, working with legislators and executive agencies on legislation regarding preschool and Birth to Three access for young children committed to the Department of Children and Families, as well as several bills designed to reduce unexpected deaths in young children.

**We support Raised Bill 1008**, which would establish an Infant and Toddler Services Board, charged with formulating a strategic plan to ensure the health and well-being of children ages birth to three, inclusive, in the state. Cross-agency collaboration and reporting is essential to improving outcomes for Connecticut's most vulnerable children. As extensive research shows, the first three years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of development, and coordinated investments in early intervention services -- from early education to health and safety initiatives -- pay for themselves many times over. Moreover, as DCF, the Office of the Child Advocate, and the Child Fatality Review Panel have reported, children under 3 die of preventable causes (such as abuse, neglect, unsafe-sleeping conditions) at far higher rates than any other group of children, as young children are physically more vulnerable, less visible to the community, and less able to speak for themselves, defend themselves, or extricate themselves from dangerous situations. Finally, Connecticut has an array of excellent services for young children, but access to these services often turns on factors such as geography, resources, and education --- factors often outside the control of young children and the families who care for them. In short, a multi-agency panel charged with focusing on improving services for our most vulnerable children is an excellent idea.



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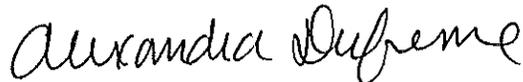
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We recommend that the **Commissioner or the Commissioner's Designee from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services** be included, as a significant number of infants and toddlers in Connecticut die, are critically injured, or are removed from their families each year due in large part to their parents' drug abuse and mental health issues.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that the Infant and Toddler Services Board contemplated by Raised Bill 1008 should not be seen as a substitute in any way for the more specific requirements contemplated by **SB 312**, which would require the relevant agencies to develop specific policies and procedures designed to protect particularly vulnerable children from unexpected death or critical injury.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alexandra Dufresne".

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