

Center for Children's Advocacy

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

Testimony of the Center for Children's Advocacy In Support of S.B. 258 - An Act Concerning Infant Safe Sleep Practices

Public Health Committee

February 20, 2015

Submitted by Alexandra Dufresne, J.D.

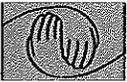
Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee:

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 rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children and youth. My colleagues and I are appointed by the Juvenile Court in Hartford to represent children -- including many infants and toddlers -- in child protection proceedings. Since January 2013, I have also served as a member of Connecticut's Child Fatality Review Panel, an interdisciplinary body charged with reviewing all unexpected deaths of children in Connecticut.

We strongly support SB 258, which would require all hospitals in Connecticut to "provide parents with informational materials regarding recommended safe sleep practices for infants, including American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations concerning safe sleep practices, to parents after the birth of a child at the hospital."

SB 258 is a crucial step in protecting the lives of Connecticut's most vulnerable children.

Unsafe sleep related deaths are the leading cause of preventable deaths of infants in Connecticut.¹ Between 2001 and 2013, the number of Connecticut infants who died where unsafe sleep conditions were present was almost three times the number of infants who died from child abuse.² Infants in Connecticut are also significantly more likely to die from unsafe sleeping conditions than from car accidents, choking, drowning, falls or any other source of accidental injury.³ In 2013 alone, 18 of the 23 infants who died unexpectedly in their sleep had risk factors associated with their sleeping environment.⁴ Preliminary data from 2014 suggest that unsafe-sleep-related deaths have remained *more or less* constant in 2014.⁵ The majority of infants who die are about 3 months old at the time of death—at an age when they cannot extricate themselves from a dangerous



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¹ Office of the Child Advocate and Connecticut Child Fatality Review Panel, *Alert: Unsafe Sleep Related Deaths Are the Leading Cause of Preventable Deaths of Infants in Connecticut*, April 2014, available at: [http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/PublicHealthAlert_Safe_SleepApr_7_FINAL__docx_\(2\).pdf](http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/PublicHealthAlert_Safe_SleepApr_7_FINAL__docx_(2).pdf)

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ February 5, 2015 Testimony of Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate before the Children's Committee in Support of SB 312 and 310.

situation.⁶ Finally, it is worth noting that some children survive unsafe sleeping conditions, but only with debilitating injuries. Our office represents a five year old boy who was born healthy. As an infant, he had what DCF described in the records as a “near-SIDS event” in his crib, and as a result, he suffered devastating neurological damage. This little boy now cannot walk, talk, or see.

These deaths and injuries are preventable. The infants we see die from easily modifiable factors, such as blankets and stuffed animals in the crib, soft mattresses, bumpers and sleeping with other people, especially adults who are heavy sleepers, obese, or under the influence of alcohol, drugs or prescription medications. No parent wants their baby to die in this way. However, many Connecticut families are not aware of the risks of unsafe sleep practices. Families who would never put their baby in a car without a car seat, feed their infant an uncut grape or hot dog, or leave an infant unintended in the bath or in a hot car might buy their newborn extra blankets or stuffed animals for the crib, unaware of the dangers these items present for young infants. In short: there is a large gap between the risks many parents perceive and the risks indicated by the data. As a mother of three young children, I can attest that my own pediatrician, at a respected practice, advised me repeatedly about the risks of guns in the home, swimming pools, and hot dogs. I recall feeling anxious that one of my children would choke on a small toy or ingest a magnet and became extra vigilant about those items. However, the only information I can recall receiving about safe sleep practices was from a baby book I happened to read, and even this book did not accurately describe the risks vis-à-vis other potential causes of death, based on local or national data.

SB 258 would remedy this information gap by requiring all hospitals in Connecticut to provide parents of newborns with safe sleep information. The hospital is the perfect place to provide this message: almost all babies are born in hospitals, the baby’s mother usually must stay at least one night, and parents - - especially first time parents – are dependent on the medical and nursing staff for all sorts of information about how best to care for a baby. There are multiple opportunities to engage with the parents of newborns so that they establish safe habits from the very beginning, when the baby is most vulnerable. Parents at this stage are generally extremely motivated and open to messages about caring safely for their babies.

SB 258 would also make Connecticut a leader in protecting its children. Illinois law requires hospitals to provide parents with information and instructional materials regarding best practices to reduce infant deaths as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.⁷ In 2013, Florida passed legislation requiring birthing centers to inform parents of safe sleep practices.⁸ However, the majority of states are silent on this issue, despite a nationwide movement to reduce sleep-related deaths and recent policies by the American Academy of Pediatrics. By making best practices the policy of the State of Connecticut, Connecticut would set an example for other states to follow.

Many of us are alive because clear-sighted people before us launched "Back to Sleep" campaigns, passed car seat and anti-drunk driving laws, and installed fire alarms and soap dispensers. Let us listen to what the data is telling us. This is a crisis — but one we can solve.

⁶ Office of the Child Advocate and Connecticut Child Fatality Review Panel, *Alert: Unsafe Sleep Related Deaths Are the Leading Cause of Preventable Deaths of Infants in Connecticut*, April 2014, available at: [http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/PublicHealthAlert_Safe_SleepApr_7_FINAL_docx_\(2\).pdf](http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/PublicHealthAlert_Safe_SleepApr_7_FINAL_docx_(2).pdf)

⁷ See Section 210 ILCS 85/11.7

⁸ See Fla. Stat. Section 383.311 and 383.318 (2013)

For the reasons stated above, we support **Senate Bill 258**. We thank the members of the committee for their dedication to protecting the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

Alexandra Dufresne, Staff Attorney
Child Abuse Project