

William G. Iovanne
61 Pasture Lane
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RE: HB 5044: Adjustments to the State of Connecticut Budget

Please support restoration of the general fund support for the Probate Court System, of approximately \$14 million, and place a reasonable cap on fees for decedents' estates

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is William Iovanne, I am a resident of the Town of Branford Connecticut. Allow me to tell you my story. In January, 2015, my grandson, Eric Kaiden Minter, was placed under the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for the State of Connecticut. My son Alec, Eric's father, is a substance abuser who currently has gone through a rehabilitation program in Florida and is currently working as a technician in another rehabilitation facility also in Florida. His mother, Megan Minter Coates was involved in a motor vehicle accident, received a DUI while Eric was in the vehicle, thus the intervention by DCF. During the time Eric was under the care of DCF, our family was subject to a case worker and the case worker's supervisor, who for the purposes of this letter shall remain nameless, who repeatedly lied about meeting with our family and updating Eric's and Megan's progress. The caseworker fabricated a report which erroneously detailed visits he had with our family members, interviews that never took place and a plan of action for our family that was later approved by his supervisor. When we objected to this report at a family meeting I pressed to have this caseworker fired, which he was. I also pressed to have the supervisor fired. Sadly, she was not. Instead, the supervisor threatened us with legal action. Her claim, on a Friday morning, was that we needed to apply to Children's Probate Court for legal custody of Eric. Given little time and less information I turned to the Honorable Jack Keyes in New Haven who in turn put me in contact with Karen M. Parzych, Clerk of Children Probate Court in New Haven. Karen, and others in the probate Court office, literally held my hand and guided me through the process of filing the necessary documents to begin the process of becoming the legal guardian for Eric. There is a lot more background to this story. For the next few months, Karen, Tamara Egan, the Probate Court Officer and Denise Rioux, the court appointed attorney for Eric worked tirelessly on our behalf to right the severe wrongs committed by DCF. They were appalled by our story and the way we were treated by DCF staff. On December 16, 2015, almost a year after this story began, my wife Angeline, Eric's mother Meagan Minter Coates and myself were granted co-guardianship of Eric. This motion got DCF out of our lives and Eric now experiences the love of his family. As a point of information, Megan is currently working for Metro-North Railroad. She has a great work ethic, has saved enough money to purchase a car and is a wonderful, loving and caring mother to Eric I would encourage the members to review my families file and judge for yourself.

If it were not for the diligent efforts and guidance of the staff at the Children's Probate Court in New Haven my grandson would probably still be under the care of the inept DCF agency. I would hope

the members of the Appropriations Committee see the true value of having dedicated employees who go above and beyond to advocate for the rights of children and their families. I believe funding should be restored to the Connecticut Probate Courts because they provide a core government function that is vital to promoting justice and is critical to the state's safety net. In this manner, the Probate Court budget pays for many social service functions including, but not limited to ; a) conservators for indigent individuals (3,900 cases/\$4.5 million); b) specialized service through Regional Children's Probate Courts (\$3.3 million); c) administering Kinship and Respite grants for guardian of children (2,600 children/\$2.0 million); d) legal counsel/attorneys for indigent parties (\$2,8 million) as constitutionally and statutorily mandates; and e) waiver of probate fees and court costs for indigent parties (approx. 6,400 matters / \$1.5 million). Furthermore, the number and proportion of cases involving mental health, children and intellectual disability have increased significantly. These cases represent more than half of the courts' caseload and consume nearly 2/3 of the courts' budget.

As elected officials who are supposed to represent the **best** interests of your constituents, I am appealing to your good and sound judgement. If you're looking to cut, don't do it at the expense of the children and families who so desperately depend on you to be their voice! The probate court staff has been a positive voice for Eric and our family. They stood by us and guided us when DCF literally "threw us under the bus." Look at the amount of money you give DCF, the most poorly managed division of State Government and ask yourselves is this money being spent wisely? I think not! You would be better served by funding the Probate Courts because they have proven time and again that they work on behalf of ALL children and families. I urge you to do the right thing and restore the funding to the Connecticut Probate Courts!

Respectfully,

William G. Iovanne

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