

Center for *Children's* Advocacy

Testimony of the Center for Children's Advocacy in Support of Raised S.B. 316: An Act Concerning the Posting of Careline Information in Public Schools

Education Committee
March 2, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Winfield, Representative Sanchez and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Sabrina Tavi and I am a Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Children's Advocacy, a public-interest law firm representing Connecticut's most at-risk children and youth. We submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 316, which provides for the posting of the Careline number operated by the Department of Children and Families ("DCF"), in a conspicuous location in schools. S.B. 316 seeks to assist children and youth suffering from sexual and physical abuse and neglect, by informing them about assistance available through the Careline and how to access it. The Center applauds this Committee's action in raising S.B. 316, however, we believe the bill can be strengthened by adopting provisions that provide schools with further guidance concerning where posters should be displayed and the content of posters.



Board of Directors

Douglas Colosky, Chair
Antonia Thompson, Secretary
William Rodriguez, Treasurer
Scott Brabant
Rudolph Brooks
David Cooney
Timothy Diemand
Kathryn Emmett (ex officio)
Robin Keller
Claude Mayo
Elise Rosen
Arnold Rutkin
Daniel Schopick
Martha Stone (ex officio)
Eric L. Sussman

Advisory Board

Miriam Berkman
Mario Borelli
John Brittain
Brett Dignam
L. Philip Guzman
Wesley Horton
Elizabeth Morgan
Eileen Silverstein
Preston Tisdale
Stanley A. Twardy, Jr.
Stephen Wizner

Executive Director
Martha Stone, JD

65 Elizabeth Street
Hartford, CT 06105
Phone 860-570-5327
Fax 860-570-5256
kidscounsel.org
speakuppteens.org

Intervention and Assistance are Critical

Approximately 7,651 children are abused or neglected each year in Connecticut.ⁱ Many additional children suffer in silence because they are victimized by caretakers and do not know where to turn for help.ⁱⁱ The consequences of not reporting abuse or neglect and of not receiving intervention and services can be very detrimental to a child's safety and in some cases, may be life threatening.ⁱⁱⁱ Studies show that victims who do not report sexual abuse are at greater risk for physical, emotional, and psychological problems that can persist throughout adulthood.^{iv}

Posting Careline Information Provides Youth with Direct Access to Assistance, Promotes a Supportive School Environment and Educates a Wider Audience

By requiring schools to post Careline information, children and youth will have direct access to professionals who can take appropriate steps to ensure their safety and well-being. Further, the public posting of Careline information creates a school environment in which students know that trusted adults will provide support if they come forward and report the abuse. Mandated reporters in educational settings are critical to detecting child abuse and neglect, and make the most reports to child protective services.^v It is important for mandated reporters to have easy access to Careline information. Public posting of Careline information will reach a wider audience including parents and school visitors, thus increasing the likelihood that abuse and neglect will be reported.

Connecticut Can Be Among the Nation's Leaders

Posting of child abuse hotline information in schools is gaining wide-spread support across the country. In 2013, Texas passed a similar bill requiring public schools to post the DCF number in a visible location that is "readily accessible by students".^{vi} In 2015, Florida required schools to display posters with the hotline number and directions to call 911 and for accessing DCF's website, in a visible location "which is readily accessible to and widely used by students".^{vii} In 2015, Missouri required schools to display posters with the hotline number in visible locations "readily accessible to students" and specifically, in all student restrooms.^{viii} Connecticut should join these states in utilizing this low-cost, effective method of increasing access to assistance for young victims of abuse and neglect.

The Following Amendments Will Strengthen S.B. 316

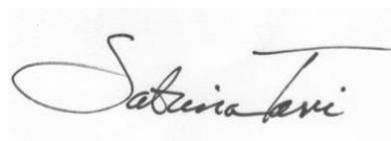
Connecticut should strengthen its legislation by following the example of other states whose legislation provides specific guidance about where posters should be displayed and the content and format of posters.

S.B. 316 should be amended to require that:

- 1) the State Department of Education develop and post on its website uniform sample posters that schools can utilize;
- 2) posters be written in English and Spanish;
- 3) posters include the DCF website;
- 4) posters be set forth in a developmentally appropriate format and language; and
- 5) posters be displayed in locations that are “highly trafficked by students”.^{ix}

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and we strongly urge you to support S.B. 316 and to adopt the Center’s recommended language.

Respectfully submitted,



Sabrina Tavi
Senior Staff Attorney
Child Abuse Project

Dorothy Diaz-Hennessey
Law Student Intern
J.D. Candidate, 2017

ⁱ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Servs, *Child Maltreatment Report for 2014 (National Child Abuse & Neglect Data System)*. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2014.pdf> at p. 33.

ⁱⁱ 91.6% of children are abused or neglected by their parents. *Id.* at p. 46. Victims of sexual and physical abuse often do not seek help because they are frightened. 60% of victims of child sexual abuse do not disclose. See <http://www.stopitnow.org/node/1847#xvii>, fn. xvi, xvii, xviii

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2015, 2 children died in Connecticut without DCF involvement. (2 died in 2014; 6 died in 2013; and 4 died in 2012). http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/dataconnect/fatalities/ci_fatalities_12-31-2015.pdf

^{iv} *A counselor’s guide to child sexual abuse: Prevention, reporting and treatment strategies*. Miller, K. L., Dove, M. K., & Miller, S. M. (Oct. 2007). http://www.counseling.org/docs/disaster-and-trauma_sexual-abuse/a-counselor-s-guide-to -sa_miller-dove-miller.doc?sfvrsn=2

^v U.S. Department of Health & Human Servs., Administration for Children & Families, *The Role of Educators in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect* (2003). <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/educator.pdf>

^{vi} Tex. Code Ann. §38.0042 (2013). In 2014, Texas amended the law to include directions for accessing the DCF website and 911 on the poster. Tex. Code Ann. §61.1051 (2014).

^{vii} Fla. Stat. §1006.061(4) (2015).

^{viii} Mo. Rev. Stat. §160.975.1 (2015).

^{ix} This will help ensure that posters do not simply end up in the school’s front office. Missouri requires information to be posted in student bathrooms so that students can access it privately, thus increasing the likelihood students will reach out for help.

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS BY THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY TO RAISED S.B. 316**

AN ACT CONCERNING THE POSTING OF CARELINE INFORMATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 10-221s of the general statutes is repealed and the
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2016*):

3 (a) Each local and regional board of education shall post in a format and
4 language that is clear and developmentally appropriate for students, and in
5 English and Spanish, the
6 telephone number and Internet website for the Careline operated by the
7 Department of
8 Children and Families, pursuant to section 17a-103a, as amended by
9 this act, in a conspicuous location that is readily accessible to and widely used
10 by students in each school under the jurisdiction
11 of the board.

(b) The Department of Education shall develop, and publish on the Department's Internet website, sample notices suitable for posting in accordance with subsection (a).

12 (c) A local or regional board of education shall permit and give
13 priority to any investigation conducted by the Commissioner of
14 Children and Families or the appropriate local law enforcement
15 agency that a child has been abused or neglected pursuant to sections
16 17a-101a to 17a-101d, inclusive, and section 17a-103. Such board of
17 education shall conduct its own investigation and take any
18 disciplinary action, in accordance with the provisions of section 17a-
19 101i, upon notice from the commissioner or the appropriate local law
20 enforcement agency that such board's investigation will not interfere
21 with the investigation of the commissioner or such local law
22 enforcement agency.

23 Sec. 2. Section 17a-103a of the general statutes is repealed and the
24 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

25 The Commissioner of Children and Families shall [provide a
26 telephone hotline] establish and operate the telephone Careline for
27 child abuse and neglect that shall be dedicated to receive reports of
28 child abuse or neglect and to provide information concerning child
29 abuse or neglect. [Such hotline] The Careline shall accept all reports of

26 child abuse or neglect regardless of the relationship of the alleged
27 perpetrator to the child who is the alleged victim and regardless of the
28 alleged perpetrator's affiliation with any organization or other entity in
29 any capacity. The commissioner shall classify and evaluate all reports
30 pursuant to the provisions of section 17a-101g.

Statement of Purpose:

To require local and regional boards of education to post in the public schools the telephone number and Internet website for the Department of Children and Families' Careline.