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**Testimony of Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff in Support of Senate Bill 347
AA Establishing a Program for Court Appointed Special Advocates in
Certain Juvenile Court Matters
Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2016**

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rehimbas and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, I am submitting testimony today in favor of Senate Bill 347, An Act Establishing a Program for Court Appointed Special Advocates in Certain Juvenile Court Matters.

This bill provides assistance to some of our most vulnerable residents in Connecticut, abused and neglected children. It gives them more of a voice and assists the state's courts by providing court appointed volunteers to advocate for the children. The volunteers produce additional reports the courts otherwise wouldn't receive and gives the courts additional information allowing judges to make better decisions for the children. They work one on one with the children, learning the specifics of each child's case and helping them to gain access to and develop the tools they need to succeed.

In other states where this program is already established, studies have shown that abused or neglected children with court appointed volunteers assisting them have better relationships with adults, value achievement more and are better able to work with others and solve conflicts. These children are more involved in the decisions that directly affect them and they know that there are people who care about them. Most importantly, children with these volunteers spend on average eight months less in foster care.

This model has been effective nationwide and should be duplicated here in Connecticut. I thank the committee for raising this concept and ask that you give the bill a favorable report. I look forward to working with you as this bill moves forward and am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.