



UNITED STATES SENATE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

**TESTIMONY OF  
UNITED STATES SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

**MARCH 18, 2016**

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 347, An Act Establishing a Program for Court Appointed Special Advocates in Certain Juvenile Court Matters.

Each year, thousands of children are the victims of child abuse and neglect. Connecticut's child protection system, with the superior court at the center, works to prevent these children from suffering additional incidents of abuse and neglect. The superior court is empowered by state law with broad authority, ranging from termination of parental rights and adoption or foster care to maintaining the child in the home while providing critical services to the parent or guardian.

Each case is different and the court relies on experienced judges and legal advocates and experts representing the parent and the child. While there is often an attorney appointed by the court to represent the interests of the child, in some cases the court's judgement would benefit from the input of volunteers who have background and training in child protection and family needs.

Court appointed special advocates have been sanctioned and funded by the federal government, starting with the passage in 1990 of the Victims of Child Abuse Act. The United States Department of Justice has monitored the National Court Appointed Special Advocates program (CASA). CASA is well recognized as an effective method for judges to obtain information critical to ensuring their decisions will allow the child the best opportunity for a stable, secure and safe future.

Senate Bill 347 will provide a legal framework for these volunteers in Connecticut – at no cost to the state. Under this legislation, the courts must appoint the special advocate who can review court documents and evidence with the appropriate releases and facilitate the delivery of services and appropriate judicial decisions in the best interests of the child.

Connecticut's children – and those in many other jurisdictions – have benefited from the dedicated efforts of these volunteers. Senate Bill 347 will provide a basic legal framework for the continued operation of court appointed special advocates which will only expand the number of children whose future will be safer and more secure because of their efforts.