



Senate Bill No. 929

AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF ADDITIONAL MANDATED REPORTERS, THE DURATION OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INVESTIGATIONS AND THE REPEAL OF CERTAIN REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

March 5, 2019

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, the largest children's rights non-profit legal organization in New England. The Center provides holistic representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation, education and training, and systemic advocacy, in areas ranging from child welfare and special education, to immigration and public health.

I respectfully submit this testimony in partial opposition of Senate Bill No. 929, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Additional Mandated Reporters, the Duration of Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations and the Repeal of Certain Reporting Requirements of the Department of Children and Families.

This bill intends to expand who is considered a mandated reporter under C.G.A. 17a-101(b). As you are aware, mandated reporters are required to file a report of suspected child abuse or neglect if they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child has been abused or neglected. They serve an important function as professionals in positions to identify and report abuse; however, S.B. No. 929's inclusion of additional mandated reporters may negatively impact Connecticut's child welfare system for a few reasons.

First, as a study published by the DCF Court Monitor's Office in 2017¹ indicated, due to increased caseloads and limited staffing as is, DCF workers cannot ensure that all cases are managed without compromising their quality of work. More recently, in a report released last week, the Court Monitor's Office stated that the most concerning issues continue to be excessive caseloads, as well as the quality of investigative work.² With limited means to thoroughly respond to the current number of reports, it is not practicable to add mechanisms that will automatically result in increased rates of filings.

¹ DCF Court Monitor's Office, Time Study of DCF Social Work Staff During March 2016 (February 2017)

² DCF Court Monitor's Office, Juan F. v. Malloy Exit Plan Status Report April 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018 (February 2019)

Second, this bill specifically proposes mandated reporters to include any person who has regular contact with and provides services to or on behalf of children pursuant to a contract with DCF. Not only will this discourage the utilization of service providers by parents worried about being reported,³ and take away those providers' discretion, but this will also seemingly result in a shift away from treating, referring, and preventing family abuse, and increasingly focus more on adhering to reporting procedures.⁴ This bill will thus discourage an honest exchange of communication between service providers and families, and deter families from seeking the help necessary to better care take for their children.

Nationally, 83% of reports of suspected child maltreatment that are investigated are never substantiated or indicated.⁵ Including any and all service providers for children contracted by DCF as mandated reporters, without qualification as to their training or expertise in recognizing child abuse and neglect, could lead to more erroneous abuse reports, and ultimately divert resources from children suffering the most. Further, the increased filing of erroneous reports will needlessly burden families, particularly families of color and families in poverty who, nationally, are statistically overrepresented in reports of suspected maltreatment.⁶ It thus follows that this legislation will continue to impact impoverished families at disproportionate rates, subjecting them to often-needlessly intrusive questioning.

Despite the good intentions that the "mandated reporting" portion of this bill was raised with, it seems unlikely that the overall welfare of children in Connecticut will be significantly bettered by it. For that reason, we ask that you not support the portion of S.B. No. 929 that calls for an increase of reporters. This bill, however, also proposes to expedite the completion of child abuse and neglect investigations from 45 to 33 days. The Center supports this effort to more quickly identify, investigate, and service families where needed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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³ See Levine & Doueck, The impact of mandated reporting on the therapeutic process: Picking up the pieces, (1995) (a study finding that in one-fourth of cases studied, reporting leads to disruption of treatment among families already receiving mental health services); and Berlin, Malin, & Dean, Effects of statutes requiring psychiatrists to report suspected sexual abuse of children, 148 American Journal of Psychiatry 449-453 (1991) (a study finding that implementation of mandated reporting resulted in dramatic decline in offenders' revelations of child sexual abuse)

⁴ Gary B. Melton, Mandated reporting: a policy without reason, 29 Child Abuse & Neglect 9-18 (2005).

⁵ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Child Maltreatment 2017 Report (2019)

⁶ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Racial Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare (November 2016)