

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Ed Vargas

SENATORS: Duff, Moore

REPRESENTATIVES: Phipps, Perillo, Davis,
DiMassa, Yaccarino

REP. VARGAS (6TH): We're hereby convening the public hearing of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am State Representative Ed Vargas, and I am the House Chair of the committee and seated next to me is Representative Phipps, who is the House Vice Chair. We have an order of business that we need to take care of before we commence the meeting and that's the safety information, and I'll ask the clerk to please read it.

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask that you note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered the room are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right, and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the Capitol Building and follow any instructions from the Capitol Police. Do not delay, and do not return unless and until you are advised that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors until an all clear announcement is heard.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much. The -- I'd just like to say what we normally do, for people who may not be familiar with the procedures here, is we bring the nominees forward, we swear them in, we allow them a few minutes to make an initial statement, after which we open it up for questions from committee members. And after we've heard from all the nominees, we ask if there's anyone from the public who would like to weigh in, either pro or con, any nominee. We also -- if there's any written communication received by the clerk, we enter it into the record, and then once we're finished with the public hearing, we proceed to our regular meeting where we take action on the nominees. We usually keep the votes open till 4 o'clock because so many of our members are serving on multiple committees, and you'll notice that some of them are not here. Some of them will be here at different points. They'll be coming in and out. That includes me. I'm supposed to be at a Labor Committee meeting right now, so I may be getting a call and Representative Phipps will be taking over for me.

So, without further ado, our first order of business is our House Joint Resolutions, and the first one is Mr. Richard Balducci of Deep River to be a member of the Board of Regents for Higher Education. And before you take a seat, will you please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated, and the floor is yours for an initial statement. Can you please turn the microphone on? Thank you, Richard.

RICHARD BALDUCCI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, also Members Phipps and DiMassa. I appreciate that, as appearing before the Legislative and Executive Nominations Committee. My name is Richard J. Balducci, and I have been nominated as a member of the Board of Regents by Speaker of the House Joe Aresimowicz. I graduated from Central Connecticut State University and went on to teach for 11 years in the Newington School System before going into business. I bring a unique skill set, having served as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University System and on several other governing boards. I served as a state legislator for 20 years, four of those being as Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives, and two years in the State Senate. In addition, I serve on the Board of Regents Finance Committee, Human Resources and Administration Committee, and the Executive Committee. CSCU's 17 institutions are a critical component of Connecticut's higher education system. The Board of Regents is responsible for providing an affordable and accessible option to students across the state, without regard for their background, level of income, or geographic location.

Now more than ever, public higher education is important to the future of our state and is an important economic driver. History has shown that the majority of our students will stay in the great state of Connecticut after graduation. They will find jobs here, build their lives here, and add to

the economic growth of this state. Our institutions provide Connecticut's employers with a talented, well-equipped group of workforce in persons. As a member of the Board of Regents, I'm excited to help move the system forward toward greater collaboration and partnership across our universities and community colleges. Students First will allow more of our resources to be in the hands of the students and create more efficiencies at our colleges. The debt-free college program, known as the PACT program, will allow more of our residents to attend and graduate without the burden of student loans. I thank you for your time and attention and for your support of the CSU system, and I will now be glad to try and answer any questions you might have.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that initial presentation. Your reputation precedes you, Mr. Balducci. I know you're a former Speaker of the House and you've been through -- through these processes before, so I have full confidence that the Board of Regents will benefit from all your -- your experience. It's very close to my family because my wife went to Central Connecticut State College at the time and -- when it was a teacher preparation college -- both she and I did 35 years in the Hartford Public School System, and she was always proud of being a Blue Devil, so. And our association with the Board of Regents goes way back to when a good friend of mine, Pete Rosa, was working back then with the Board. So, I really don't have much questions. I think -- is this a renomination, or have you served already?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: I've been around for quite a while, Mr. Chairman. This is a renomination.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Renomination. So, you've had experience with the Board of Regents. Any thoughts you'd like to share in terms of the direction the Board is taking or what the future challenges or issues you see in the near future?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: Well, I think one of the challenges we're facing is student enrollment. We're going to try -- and have been working on -- and the Student First program is in that process of trying to bring more students into our colleges and universities. The PACT program, which is the program which allows for free college tuition is one that we think in the future is going to be beneficial to it. The Guided Pathways program, I think, will help keep and bring students who are not totally set in their ways as to the direction they want to take. This will help them do that, from the beginning to the end help them, give them a program, help them follow through, and help them become successful in whatever challenges that they feel that they have before them. We have an articulation agreement, which we passed a few years ago, which allows for a smooth pass through for students in the community colleges to our university system, which will benefit. So, those are a couple of things, I think, that we're -- the direction we're heading in, and the Student First program will help save dollars, which as you well know is a real problem, in not only the state of Connecticut but across the country for education.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, very good, and I remember when -- I think Central was one of the first of the state colleges that had a doctoral program, an EdD

in education -- a doctorate in educational leadership. So, I'm very happy to see the direction the colleges are going in, and I congratulate you on your reappointment to the Board of Regents. Are there any questions or comments from committee members?

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Sure. Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Congratulations on your appointment, and I'm looking forward to working with you. Just two quick questions. When you talked about that free college for the community college system, when some of the critics or opponents of that policy suggest that the students that would receive free community college wouldn't have any skin in the same, how would you respond to that?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: They wouldn't have any skin in the game? Is that --?

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): They wouldn't have -- in other words, they wouldn't have an investment in that. In other words, they should pay something in order for them to have some more accountability, responsibility to that. How would you respond to that?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: I think many of the students that are coming and involved have skin in the game in just the fact that they need help to get into the system to afford a college education. Most of those young men and women -- and some of them, by the way, aren't young -- getting into the system come from economic backgrounds that aren't the best. Many of them are first-time college entrants into the

system, and to say that, I don't think is rational. Although, I understand the fact that some people will pay, but the predominance of those students that enter into the community colleges, particularly where this debt-free system is supposed to take effect, are more appreciative. And just the fact that if we can produce positive graduates, that's well worth the investment of the state of Connecticut into a long-term program.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you. I actually agree with you completely. As if the barrier of entry into a college and university system isn't hard enough, adding additional financial constraint doesn't prove any more of a level of commitment to anything, so I totally agree with you. Just another quick question regarding the Student First, sort of, framework. How do you think that framework has been communicated, and what else could be done in making sure that we have full -- I don't wanna say buy in but for lack of a better word -- buy in from all the different stakeholders, students, administration, professors, so on and so forth?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: Students First is a program -- it's like anything else, it's a new program to try and save education here, particularly our college students, the community college system. And, when you think about it, it's a change. Nobody likes change. Even when you -- or many people have difficulty with change. For instance, if you're buying a new home, and you're moving from house A to house B, it's a choice you make, but it's a change and there's still a sense of anguish or concern about the move. We're moving from one system, actually to consolidate a system, not moving from

one but trying to consolidate a system of these community colleges, so that economically, we, as the state of Connecticut, can go on and pay for tuitions, etc., as we are under the debt-free program. And we're going to try and do that by consolidating and saving dollars in the expenses that we are indicating -- that we're involved with, such as purchasing is going to be a big one, I.T. is another one -- saving those kinds of dollars as we move forward so that the people involved in the college system can get their education at a reasonable cost.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you very much. Appreciate your answers.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I was thinking what Vice-Chair Phipps was saying about some people believe that if you pay you value the education more than if you don't pay. The fact is some of these young people, and older people too, do pay in a certain way because I've had discussions with some waiters, waitresses, people doing certain kinds of jobs, and they have to give up some of their hours in those jobs, and it's a balancing act. You know, they need the money now, or do they defer making money to go back to school. So, there is already an economic factor involved in that. And I try to convince them that once they have their degree they'll make up for whatever losses they have in the immediate, or whatever immediate gain they have with the menial jobs they may be doing at the time. Although important jobs, many of them are not very high-paying jobs, and once you get that degree, you hopefully will make enough money that in a couple of years you'll make up whatever you lost going into

the school. But there is always some hardship involved -- transportation, costs -- 'cause there's always hidden costs involved in that decision for the long-term benefit of a college education. The -- and, you know, the system's come a long way since the days of Bill Seavers [Phonetic], and I've been around a long time, watching the changes, and -- and I hope it all goes in a direction that's positive for the people of Connecticut and especially for our students and that we see that benefit -- that economic benefit too of being able to attract employers with a highly skilled workforce. Any thoughts on that?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: Just the idea that we have a -- we have wonderful programs out there in the community colleges and manufacturing, etc., which are really appreciated and supported by private -- the private sector. One of the things I often tell students when I see them is, you know, they can take away your house, they can take away your job, but they can never take away your education and your degree once you have it. And it's always worth more money than if you didn't have that degree, and I think moving forward in the future, many of them recognize that. And the people you were speaking of, the waitresses, etc., who may be working at a minimum wage or whatever, certainly can upscale their future by having a degree and working hard at it. And, as you said, many of them do this juggling not only a job and college, many of them juggling a job, a family, and college. So, it's not an easy task for many of those folks that we contend with on a daily basis in our colleges.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, congratulations once again on your reappointment, and before we let you go, there's a question we ask of all our nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe may prove embarrassing to the governor, to the state, or to this committee?

RICHARD BALDUCCI: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. And that brings us to our second nominee, Bonnie Burr of Brookfield to be a member of the State Board of Education. Bonnie, would you please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

BONNIE BURR: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated.

BONNIE BURR: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And, as is customary, this is the point in the agenda where we allow our nominee to make their initial introductory statements. So the floor is yours.

BONNIE BURR: Great. Thank you so much, Chairman Vargas, Vice-Chairman Phipps, and Representative DiMassa. My name is Bonnie Burr. I'm from Brookfield, Connecticut, and I am absolutely honored to have been nominated to serve on the State Board of Education. Per State Statute, I am sitting here today because I am being asked to fill the agricultural position on the State Board of Education. My background is 30 years in the field

of agriculture, both from an education perspective, from industry, as well as working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition to having worked in the industry, I also have volunteered extensively working with 4-H and programs such as agriscience and FFA. I currently work for UConn Extension, where I'm a department head and I work in the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources. One of the programs that I have oversight for is the 4-H program. 4-H has 17,000 youth statewide, ages five to 18, and one of the main parts of our program is STEM, and part of that STEM is the agricultural programs that we bring forward both with livestock, with food production, and with horticulture.

One of the key components that we bring forward, in addition to our STEM, is also health and leadership and community service. One of the things that we're striving to do right now is to work extensively with your young people and helping them find balance in life, finding that emotional, social, and physical well-being that takes forward and helps them be productive and competent and caring adults. One of the things that we also pride ourselves on is workforce preparation and career exploration, and I think that that's one of the things that I'm gonna be able to bring to the Board of Education to really help young people identify where they can find what -- what really matters to them. And it doesn't mean that it's necessarily going on and getting a four-year degree, or a graduate degree, or a professional degree but where they're gonna find the passion that they have to have to have a strong -- a strong career going forward, and that very well may be within our trades.

One of the other things that I wanted to be sure to address is that we're just coming off of a strategic visioning project at our program at our college, and we've worked extensively statewide, had 10,000 data points. Amongst those were talking with a number of our teens about what was important to them and what they wanted to see in terms of educational opportunities. And certainly, we were delighted to see that they wanna see innovative agriculture. They wanna see things that deal with health equity and food justice. Things along those lines that I think, again, will be very helpful as I go forward in my role as a member of the Board of Education. I'm, again, very pleased to be here today and more than happy to take the questions that you might have at this time.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. Now is this a renomination, or is this your initial nomination?

BONNIE BURR: Oh, I'm brand new. I had my first meeting I sat in on last week, so brand new to the process.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): So, we won't ask you too much about what's been going on at the State Board of Education, but I do congratulate you on your appointment to the Board of Education. And you have broad experience with higher education already ["Yes" in background] with -- with the sciences and agriculture and, of course, UConn was originally an agricultural schools, so. And it's great to bring your perspective to the State Board of Education. And one thing I always ask of people that get

nominated to the State Board of Education is to please do what you can for our neighborhood public schools. I know that, you know, there's a lot of new models out there that are -- you know, that have received a lot of attention, but the fact is that over 90 percent of our kids are in their neighborhood public schools and that's where we really need to make an emphasis because that's where a lot of the poor kids are, the English-limited kids, a lot of the special needs kids. The neighborhood public schools are open to everybody, and --

BONNIE BURR: I can't agree with you more, and I think -- just I'll share a really quick story with you. One of the things that we do in 4-H is a lot of after-school programs. We get a number of grants from the federal government to carry those out, and we had a program that we were doing in Meriden around -- around nutrition and helping kids understand that, you know, healthy nutrition is something that they can -- they can have a lot of fun at. And we had one of our -- one of our coordinators had a -- just a little bit of milk left in the gallon jug 'cause we always give them a healthy snack. And the -- 7 years old, he said to the coordinator, he said, Miss Wanda, what are you gonna do with the rest of that milk? And she said, well, would you -- would you like to have the rest of it? And he goes, No. He said, I'd like to take it home because mommy's milk -- mommy's food money doesn't come until next week, and he doesn't have enough -- we don't have enough milk in the house for my cereal tomorrow morning. And those are the sorts of things that we really need to address. We've got to be acknowledging that this -- these are the

opportunities that we need to get into our public schools, both during school and after school, and that's one of the other things that I wanna be able to bring to -- to my role with the Board of Education.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That's great. And we've been joined by our Senate Chair, Senator Duff; by our Ranking Member, Representative Perillo, and by Representative Davis. And, at this point, I'll open it up for any questions or comments by any of the committee members. Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bonnie, welcome.

BONNIE BURR: Good to see you. How are you?

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Congratulations.

BONNIE BURR: Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): I've had the opportunity to work with you on a number of issues over the years, dealing with agriculture specifically. So I'm excited for you to be serving on the State Board of Education, and your knowledge and extensive experience in that area, it will be a great addition to that board, and I know your support for the vocational-technical schools will be a very positive thing -- agricultural vocational schools. If you wanna talk about the need for expansion of those schools and what's necessary here at the state level in your view.

BONNIE BURR: Sure, absolutely. One of the things that Representative Davis was referring to is our agriscience programs with the FFA program. You'll see 'em around the building, they've got those blue corduroy jackets on. They're just an amazing -- it's an amazing program that really enhances the STEM education that we're getting at our local public schools, again, community-driven, regional in its approach, because not every school, obviously, can afford to have, you know, the opportunity to have one. But I think the real -- the real key to this is that we're having young people explore what agriscience looks like, and for a lot of people it's like, oh, you're gonna go milk a cow, you're gonna go plant some corn. And what they don't realize is the amazing engineering and other opportunities that we get from a technical perspective looking at the science of agriculture, and so it's that kind of a school that really offers opportunities above and beyond what -- what you can get at, you know, some of the other public schools systems that we've got.

You know, and again, we spoke to the fact that the trades are very, very important. You know, we need to have welders. We need electricians. We've gotta have plumbers. We need to have, you know, folks that can work, you know, in HVAC on our farms because there's a whole lot of refrigeration that happens. So, these are the kinds of programs that -- that, you know, while we fully support, you know, what you can get with a degree, it's also the skill set that you're learning in technical schools and, you know, some of the manufacturing opportunities that we're getting. When we look at how we're gonna build greenhouses, last year Higher Ed brought forward a bill that wanted to address how we were

going to look at controlled-environment agriculture, and that -- that's what gets young people excited. You know, they wanna work someplace where they can be around plants year round, and the way we're gonna do that is with greenhouse production. It's not gonna be with seasonal growing, you know, with vegetable production and things like that, but it's gonna be getting into the 365 growing and extended season growing that we can do, you know, a lot more with our vegetables and plants.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Any other member of the committee who has any remarks or comments or questions? If not, I wanna congratulate you again on your nomination for the State Board of Education, and I know you'll bring your perspective there and that'll add a lot to the deliberations of the board. And before I let you go, there is a question we ask of all our nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe may prove embarrassing either to the governor, to the state, or to this committee?

BONNIE BURR: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

BONNIE BURR: Thank you so much, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that brings us to our third and final nominee under House Joint Resolutions, Martha Paluch Prou of Bloomfield to be a member of the State Board of Education. Before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated, and please make sure the mic is on, and the floor is yours for your initial statement.

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: [Background noise] Good morning, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and members of the committee. My name is Martha Prou, and I'm here today as a nominee to be a member of the State Board of Education. I am honored to be appointed by the governor and hope to serve to the best of my abilities to meet the needs of this position. I am nominated to fill a position on the board that is required to have manufacturing experience. I have spent the last ten years of my career working in manufacturing at Phoenix Manufacturing in Enfield, where I am director of administration and compliance. Prior to coming home to Connecticut, I worked for the Office of Manufacturing and Services at the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Phoenix Manufacturing provides complex machine parts to the aerospace industry. We are a family-owned and women-owned and operated business. The CEO is my mother, Krystyna Paluch, and my brother, Peter, and I are in place as the next generation of ownership. In addition to my daily responsibilities, I have also worked on recruitment and workforce development within our company and our state. At Phoenix, we work with the local community colleges and technical high schools to bring in new apprentices and new hires. We recently started working with Enfield High School to bring in

students on tours and get them interested in manufacturing and technology.

In our sector, the technical schools and community colleges are pumping out graduates, but they still need more training. We see apprenticeship as a critical tool to bridging the skills gap between recent graduates and our hiring needs. We are also heavily involved in the CMC, Connecticut Manufacturers Collaborative, and the ACM, Aerospace Components Manufacturers. This legislative body has been a great partner in supporting manufacturing and workforce development. There are many pockets of excellence around our state, ranging from school programs to employer programs and great collaborations in between. I look to this appointment as an opportunity to deepen the ties and collaboration between K to 12 education and all the stakeholders in the business and workforce development community, including the State Legislature. I look forward to taking your questions at this time.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much, and it's -- you bring that manufacturing experience to the board. Is this an initial appointment?

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: It is an initial appointment.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very good. Well, you know, we know that manufacturing has gone through a lot of changes in that it's not what it used to be in the 19th century that we've a -- with computerization and all the robots and everything, it's turned into quite a sophisticated sector of the economy. And I think it's important in terms of Connecticut and

positioning ourselves as a center for employment that that's an important filler of Connecticut's economy. So I'm glad to see that Governor Ned Lamont has appointed you to the State Board of Education, and I think you bring a lot with you. I really don't have any particular questions, unless any other member of the committee would like to say something. Yes, Representative?

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Martha, congratulations on your appointment.

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Full disclosure, I think I've known Martha since we were in kindergarten together in East Windsor, so very excited to see the release nominating you for the State Board of Education. I think you bring a tremendous amount of experience and insight into the board in the need for growth in the manufacturing sector. I congratulate you and your mother, who is here joining you in support today -- a constituent of mine. And, I wanna say -- was it the 30th anniversary just --

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: Yeah, last year.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Just last year, so, of her family's company in Enfield, and to see the growth of that company over the years, as I've toured the facility a couple of times, and to see the advanced manufacturing, as you mentioned Chairman Vargas, what's available there. It's pretty amazing and the capital intense nature of that and what you guys have been able to do and bring to the table to the supply chain here in Connecticut and across the

world. So, congratulations on your appointment. We're very excited to have you on there, and I think you bring a lot to the table for the State Board of Education. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Congratulations on your appointment.

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: Thank you.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Just a few questions about equity and kind of the next step for education for the students. Oftentimes it's argued that not all students should go to college and, in particular, with your background in manufacturing, what do you think the next steps could be for continued education after students say finish a manufacturing program at like Vinal Tech or any other of the technical high schools in Connecticut.

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: Sure. So, I have to commend the Department of Education and the framework -- and the state for the framework we've been building for multiple career pathways, and especially for pathways that you can get on and get off and continue education at different stages. So, somebody graduating from a manufacturing program at Vinal, at Cheney can either do an apprenticeship and go straight into the workforce, you know, during their senior year and then transition into a job. And then, once they're there, they have the opportunity to kinda either continue working and work their way up to make, you know, a very high

livable wage, or they can go back and take advantage of the many technical programs at our community college and at other institutions, such as Goodwin, that you're there, you're working, and I have an interest in quality and I can go and continue my education, or I have an interest in this and, you know -- And I know there's a lot of work to make those beginner programs or the transitions of gaining credits, continuing that -- that no education time is lost or has to be redone, and that's really important, and especially for the populations that -- like we discussed with the community colleges -- that need the most help. We wanna definitely offer them the opportunities that they deserve and the aid that they can get to continue going, if they want to, or at least get that initial push into the industry and then run with it at that point.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And this is another question about options for families. What do you think -- what do you think the roles should be for magnet schools, technical schools, charter schools, and all the other different pedagogies in education? What role do you think that has for all of our students in public education?

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: I think they play a really important role of offering diverse options. Not every student fills a prescriptive role, right. We understand that not everybody fits into the same box. So, as children grow and evolve and they have options to different programs along the way to say, I have an interest in this, this school allows me to do that -- and I think it's a really important thing to be able to offer those opportunities, but also

that there is a minimum level of education offered to everybody, that there is no divergent path, that everybody at least, you know, graduates with the same basic skills, not science, civics, or whatever. Because, you know, we're looking for employees, but we're also looking for engaged citizens and generally good people. But, I think, all of them -- and I've been very pleased from the industry side to see the development of all of these problems, either through different schools or the fact that, I would say, normal high schools are offering manufacturing and technology programs as well to expose the students, so that when they do go to the next school that they have an interest in engineering or they can go into a technical program, so that kids don't, you know, graduate with a ton of debt and no path forward.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps. Any further comments or questions? If not, I wanna congratulate you again on Governor Ned Lamont's appointment of you to the State Board of Education. And, before I let you go, there's a question I ask of all nominees. Is there anything in your background that you feel may prove embarrassing to the governor, to the state, or to this committee?

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MARTHA PALUCH PROU: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that brings us to the first Senate Joint Resolution, Gregg Scully to be a member of the Connecticut Port Authority. Gregg, would you please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

GREGG SCULLY: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And, as is customary, this is an opportunity for you to give us your introductory statement, and the floor is yours.

GREGG SCULLY: I am a sergeant in the Norwalk Police Department and have been for the past 21-plus years. I have run different divisions in my time, K-9 handler division, marine division, and I am currently in charge of our ESU scuba team. Along with that, I have been the harbor master for the past 4 years for the city of Norwalk. I've been a boater, been on the water for basically my entire life, since I was ten years old, so I have a vast interest in the boating community, the water community.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Gregg, well, congratulations on your appointment to the Port Authority. I see that this is an initial appointment, so you'll be going on the board for your first term of office there.
[Background talking]

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Gregg, thank you for being here and for your willingness to serve. I just wanted to reiterate a little bit of what you said. You are a Norwalk police officer currently, the harbor master as well, and an appointment to the Port Authority Board. Can you just talk a little bit about how some of those experiences, you think,

could be beneficial for you on the Port Authority, which is a new -- you know, relatively new board? I don't think we've had -- I don't think we've had a harbor master on the -- on the board before. I could be mistaken, but I don't think we have. And a little bit about maybe what you think you might be able to bring to the Port Authority Board?

GREGG SCULLY: Well, as a member of the police department, my main career has been on the water, such as water safety, enforcement, whatnot. As a harbor master, I work with the safety and navigation of the harbor. I'm currently involved with the big Walk Bridge project, as far as planning that and setting things up as far as the way the system is going on that. I work with DEP, the coast guard closely, Aquaculture as far as water quality testing and whatnot. So, basically, I'm always in the water. Regards to commerce part of it, I work well with the oyster industry that's out of Norwalk. So, I've seen an economic growth. We have a lot of tourism in Norwalk, a big boating industry also in Norwalk. So, I've been -- [Crosstalk]

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. And I think one of the -- one of the issues for us, at least for me anyway, when the Port Authority was created is that understanding the importance of our large ports, New London and Bridgeport and New Haven, but also recognizing the value of our small ports too. And I think you have a unique perspective coming from Norwalk and being on the marine division and being the harbor master that would -- that would give you a voice for some of the smaller ports in order to advocate for them as well for the fact that there's jobs associated with those small ports, there's a

lot of industry associated with those small ports, and that they have needs as well. So, we need to look at -- 'cause I remember when the legislation was written, we wanted to make sure it was specifically written so that we did not -- we geared this towards all ports in our state, not just the larger ones or the smaller ones but that we took a balanced view on that. So, do you have any comments on that at all, or?

GREGG SCULLY: I mean Norwalk is -- it is a small port, but it's a large port as far as the industry they have, the tourism, and, like I said, the boating, the projects that we have going on. So, even though it's small, we're very busy. We've got the 13 islands that surround, so there's -- like I said, for a small harbor, if you want, it's actually a big harbor for what we do.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Great. Thank you very much. Thanks for your willingness to serve, and with all your other duties, we know you've got a lot to do. So, thank you for that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GREGG SCULLY: Thank you. Appreciate it.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Duff. Any further questions or remarks? Yes, Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Gregg, for your willingness to serve. It sounds like you've got a lot on your plate there, but those things all play into this role on the Port Authority. So, I think it's a very interesting perspective to have the law enforcement side of the

-- the harbor in there. You said you've been doing that your entire career on the Norwalk Police Department.

GREGG SCULLY: Yes, yes.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And what kind of duties does that include? It's safety, enforcement. Like I said, right now, the past five years or so, it's been with the Walk Bridge project that's going on and a lot of safety issues. We've got tons of rowers. We've got, I think it's 300 rowers in the area, all the different teams, that's expanded. We have the fishing industry in there, the oyster industry. So, we're always working with either those individually or as a group. Like I said, the coast guard, we work closely with, DEEP as far as regulations, and the water quality is a big thing. That's improved lately with Aquaculture. It's all the agencies tied in and working well together to accomplish, you know, the main goal of compliance and everything else with the harbors.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Excellent, yeah. I think you bring a very interesting perspective to the Port Authority, so congratulations on your appointment by Senator Duff, and I wish you the very best. Thank you.

GREGG SCULLY: Thank you. I appreciate it.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Do you see an improvement in terms of people following the rules and regulations on the waterways, or which direction do you think that's going? Is it getting better or worse?

GREGG SCULLY: It's definitely getting better. There's less accidents. It's more education of safety and whatnot. Being out there, the presence, that they see us, it actually helps people slow down and, you know, follow the rules of navigation and whatnot, but it definitely has made a big difference.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And in terms of DEP, are they finding less pollution, more pollution, have you heard about it?

GREGG SCULLY: It's essentially -- the quality of the water has actually improved. It really has. With the Harbor Commission, as far as putting permits together, new docks, new buildings and stuff like that. The guidelines for the runoff water, holding tanks for the runoff water and everything, has vastly improved. The marine life has come back a little bit, but it's -- in the past ten years, it's definitely improved. And, you know, all the permits and regulations that have been in place have definitely helped.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I'm glad to hear that. I don't have any further questions. If no other member of the committee has any further comments, I wanna once again congratulate you on your appointment to the Port Authority. And, before I let you go, there's a question we ask of all our nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe may prove embarrassing to the governor, to the state, or to this committee?

GREGG SCULLY: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I expected a no [Laughing] from a law enforcement officer. Thank you very much. And that concludes this portion and brings us to the next nominee, Sarah Healy Eagan of West Hartford to be reappointed as Child Advocate. And, before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated. And this is one of those key positions, and I'm sure the committee members are looking forward to your [Background talking]-- But, before we let you speak, I've had a request that we stand at ease for a moment, so can you please be patient with us? [Gavel] Back to order please. Sorry for the interruption. We're about to hear the initial introductory statement by Sarah Healy Eagan who has been reappointed at Child Advocate. The floor is yours.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Okay, thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon, Representative Vargas, Representative Phipps, distinguished members of the committee. It is an honor and a privilege to be nominated for another term as the state's Child Advocate by Governor Ned Lamont, and I thank the committee for this opportunity to introduce or re-introduce myself and to discuss my record as the head of the Office of the Child Advocate for the past six years and my vision for another term.

The Office of the Child Advocate, as you know, is an independent state agency with seven people (I didn't

add that), charged with responding to citizen concerns, investigating systems that serve children, and providing the public with critical information and recommendations as to how we can improve publicly funded services for vulnerable children. During my tenure leading this state office, OCA has published approximately two dozen investigative reports, public health alerts, and issued briefs covering a range of topics from child fatality prevention, system reform for children with disabilities, and the restraint and seclusion of students with special needs. A full list of published reports is attached to this testimony. We've helped write over a dozen new laws addressing children's safety and well-being, supporting lawmakers efforts to ensure new parents have information about safe sleep choices for their babies, to improve child welfare practice for infants and toddlers, to address chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities, and to end the dangerous practice of face-down restraint of children in schools. Most recently, we have been working to increase transparency and accountability for state-run and state-licensed treatment programs for children and to increase access to suicide prevention training for towns and school communities.

I wanted to say that I love leading the Office of the Child Advocate and advocating for individuals and families who need help. I have a passion for and a commitment to making the world a better place, a more safe, more nurturing, and more compassionate place for all people. At OCA, we have two interlocking functions. One is neutral fact-finder, digging into things that people may not know very

much about, institutions or foster care, and presenting those facts both passionately and dispassionately to the public and to lawmakers, so that we can then participate in advocacy for the people that we are writing and talking about, and that is an essential part of bending the arc of the moral universe in the way that we want it to bend, in a continuous evolution of our values.

During my time as the state's Child Advocate, I have reviewed and worked on some of the following concerns and cases with my OCA colleagues: young children with specialized needs placed in seclusion dozens of times, without access to appropriate services and supports; suicidal youth in custody responded to with handcuffs or chemical agent; children with developmental disabilities, who are unable to voice concerns about abuse and neglect to authorities; and the need to improve risk assessment and safety planning for abused and neglected infants and toddlers. With all of these matters OCA investigates and advocates, bringing concerns to the attention of state and local officials for review and problem solving, and ultimately bringing the information and recommendations reform to the attention of the Legislature and the public.

Whenever OCA can work closely with state and local administrators, we welcome those opportunities. In the coming year, I am privileged to work with my colleagues on issues affecting substance-exposed infants, conditions for incarcerated youth, safe transportation for students with disabilities, and the need to increase child sexual abuse prevention efforts. We will work on these issues going forward, as we have in the past, participating in

state task forces and legislative working groups, meeting with state leaders across systems, chairing the state's Child Fatality Review Panel, and making recommendations for reform borne out of independent fact-finding and discussions with partners.

While it is not the job of the Office of the Child Advocate to be a state agency critic, it is the statutory responsibility of the Child Advocate to be an independent voice for vulnerable people and to share information with the public. There will always be a need for that, even as we make progress forward. With awareness of the grave and critical mission of this office, and the trust the Legislature has placed in the Office of the Child Advocate, I strive to do this job fairly, competently, with respect and professionalism across government and across systems. Like many people here, I've not come to this work by accident. My path to becoming a child advocate started when I was kid, scared and alone at times. Like many children I've advocated for over the years, my personal journey was fraught with some painful challenges. Because I grew up with people in my family who had or continued to be affected by chronic and acute mental illness, I saw with young eyes what many institutions look like -- a cinder block visiting space, an elderly woman slumped in a hallway, my loved one lying in a mat on the floor, sometimes rough treatment of people who only needed to be understood and helped.

As a young person, I left these encounters often feeling powerless. I longed for the ability and the knowledge to help people who needed help the most, to say and to do something to make change. I

profoundly admired my mother and my aunt, both fierce and loving, who I saw as compassionate and tireless advocates for civil rights. Today, I too am blessed to be of service, thanks to Governor Malloy and now Governor Lamont and this Legislature. Every day, I can help make change. Today, I'm a lawyer, the state's Child advocate, a wife, and a mother to three beautiful children, one of whom is developmentally disabled and dependent on the very systems I now work to improve. As I watch my family grow, I know firsthand the progress we have made for vulnerable children and the miles still left to go before I can sleep. I go to bed at night both grateful for all the blessings in my home and work, but sometimes still with a heartbeat of anxiety, telling me how much work remains. The OCA and I, as the Child Advocate, are just small role players in a march towards a world that values the inherent worth and dignity of all persons. I am so grateful to be part of this and to work with such dedicated and compassionate staff members and colleagues and advocates throughout the state. Leading the Office of the Child Advocate has been the privilege of my adult life. I am deeply humbled by the opportunity to continue this important work and respectfully ask for your consideration for a second term.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much for that introductory statement. I've always been an admirer of that office, and I'm glad we have an independent agency that looks out -- with one goal, looking out for the interests of the most vulnerable in our population. And I also follow in the news the Child Advocate's positions on many issues, including keeping DCF's feet to the fire and making sure all our state institutions are running in a way

that puts the children's interest's first, and I think that you've done a great job.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And you haven't allowed politics or pressures to diminish the strength of the office, which I think is commendable, even though, you know, some of our institutions wanna get out from under consent decrees and wanna get out from federal supervision. You know, they have to earn their way out, and you make sure that that's done, and I think it's -- when it comes to child safety, my family's been involved in that for a long time. I've had a cousin who worked as a Child Safety Advocate for New York City, one did work for DCF in New Jersey, one -- two sister-in-laws that work for DCF here in Connecticut, one at the training center on Hudson Street the other one in adoptions in Waterbury, and it's always a difficult thing. It's a difficult thing. It's a balancing act. What is really in the best interest of the child? Sometimes keeping the child with the family is in the best interest, and sometimes removing the kid, but we don't have a crystal ball, so sometimes things don't work out the way we'd like them to work out. And it's a stressful, stressful job for everyone involved in child safety, and it's a -- but it's important work, and it's something that, you know, we as a society rely on people like you to make sure that our kids are getting every opportunity they deserve. So, I commend you for your role as Child Advocate. Keep up the good work, and I really don't have any questions of you, but I see Representative Yaccarino. [Background talking] Okay,

Representative, you are the Ranking Member, so you have the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have questions, but I have to say, as I was reviewing your remarks and, you know, what the job entails, the first thing that struck me quite frankly is that you do something that I could never do and would never do, and I think that's probably true of most people here in the state of Connecticut. You deal with some very difficult situations, you don't need me to tell you that, but I just wanted to say that I recognize that and appreciate what you do, and there probably aren't many people who could do it as well. So, thank you for your service.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Representative Yaccarino followed by Representative Davis.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for what you do and for being here and willing to serve to help our children. As the Advocate, you mentioned suicide, and I was just at a suicide prevention forum last week, and what is the biggest challenge you see for young boys and girls in our state and in, unfortunately, the rise of suicide? I know it's a difficult question, but you see it all.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Yeah, that's a very good -- we do see it all, and I think what we have seen and you may have heard at the forum is that the rate of suicide has increased among our youth.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: It is now the second leading cause of preventable death for children, starting at age ten and continuing into their adulthood. So, suicide is a disease that we have to bring the same attention to preventing as we do to other diseases, like cancer, heart disease, diabetes. And children are telling us -- one of the things we do in this state -- there's actually a bill pending this session on continuing to encourage more school districts to participate in a CDC model survey called a Youth Risk Behavior Survey that asks kids questions voluntarily and confidentially about their own mental health, their own experiences. And we've been doing that survey in Connecticut for quite some time, and what it tells us is that what our kids are telling us is that they do feel a sense of alienation or isolation and despair. And I think we have to respond to that by -- in part by talking about, acknowledging it, and also talking with kids at a young age, not waiting till high school but talking at a younger age, you know, from my kids' age, elementary school, about how to ask for help, how to be connected, how to make friendships, particularly in the age of social media, which really disconnects us from each other in some ways. And so, I think paying attention to these issues and educating our school communities about everything from prevention to suicide prevention would go a long way to helping.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So, as an advocate, do you and your agency, do you like communicate with the elementary schools in our state or the State Board of Ed to either just to have awareness -- I know I speak to elementary school kids to high school kids,

and it's always about pressure. They feel so much pressure.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Right.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): And I -- you know, I feel bad for them in a way, and I always say our phones are the worst -- our worst enemies, even as a young child. Put that away and just try to believe in yourself. But, I just -- I can't thank you enough, and I know it's gotta be difficult, like our Ranking Member said. And it's just that our society has changed so much, and you see it on the frontlines, and I just wish that we could slow down, and we can't unless we do it together.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: I think that's right, and we do -- just for clarification -- we talk about this work everywhere. We talk about it in the Children's Committee. We advocate for these bills. We help write them. We chair the state's Child Fatality Review Panel, which is the most grim work that we do. We participate -- I have folks here who help participate in suicide prevention training. In fact, one of my colleagues here is going to be giving an essential suicide awareness training to legislators very soon. So, we're sort of everywhere talking about these issues and participating in state workgroups and task forces sharing what we know and what we think folks can be working on to improve things for our kids.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well, thank you so much, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. Representative Davis, you have the floor.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Madam Advocate, for all that you do. I wanna echo what has been said before. You're doing a service that is unfortunately needed in many respects because, you know, we would hope that children are cared for and taken care of here in the state, but we all know that unfortunately in society that doesn't happen. So, we thank you for being an advocate for them and working so strongly for that, and I do have a question for you. I know -- I think it was last year -- we passed legislation to look at both Solnit North and Solnit South, and your office was involved in the investigations in both of those facilities. And Solnit North is in East Windsor, not in my district anymore, but in one of the towns that I represent. And my understanding is that that facility has low daily attendance by children, rather high costs for the state to operate, and I'm interested in your perspective as the Child Advocate. Is that the best facility for those children in need that are placed there, or is there other opportunities in the state that -- whether they be in community settings or at other facilities that the state operates that would be better suited for the children that are -- that are there on a rotating basis, from my understanding?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: So, I think that's a great question, Representative Davis, and one that's been asked, I think, many times by the Legislature -- sort of, what's the role of the state in running facilities, treatment facilities, for children. So,

the Solnit Campus, which as you said has a North Campus in East Windsor and a South Campus in Middletown, has been part of the continuum of care for kids with significant psychiatric treatment needs for many, many, many years. So, the question of the sort of efficacy of having that be run by the state versus licensed and privatized has been talked about -- there are pros and cons to that, I guess is what I would say, right. And that issue has come up before the Legislature many times, I think most recently in 2011, when there was a movement to sort of privatize what was then called Riverview -- it's been re-named the Albert J. Solnit Center -- and there were a lot of folks, to be honest with you -- a lot of folks in the treatment provider community who did not want those facilities privatized, right. They felt that there had to be a safety net for children, run by the state, that couldn't and shouldn't say no when kids have profound needs, right.

And so, Solnit Hospital and it's PRTFs have become that in many ways, you know, the place that children can always find care if they need it. Now that being said, I think it's -- we're always right as stakeholders and lawmakers to be vigilant about quality and safety of care, the cost consciousness of that care, and always asking are the resources being spent the best way that they can. You know, this Legislature, over time, saw fit to maintain a state-operated campus, right. So, that's really the decision that ultimately lawmakers came to, and I think what we brought forward is that, within that structure, do we have the transparency and oversight when a facility is state-run and managed to ensure transparency with the public and sustainability of

high-quality care and safety. Our ultimate recommendation to the Legislature was that we do not have that framework in place. And following a fatality investigation facility investigation about a year-and-a-half ago, we came forward to the Legislature with recommendations to maintain the campus but to eliminate its statutory licensing exemption and to convene folks around the table to ensure framework for outside licensure and outside reporting. And I'm happy to say that in the wake of those hearings and that legislation, which passed last session, our office has been working in conjunction with DCF and the Department of Public Health to begin that work as a consensus project. So, I think that's a big change that I think will help us, over time, move in the direction I think you're asking about, which is ensuring that these state dollars are serving kids the best way they can, in a way that we can ask about and know about.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Can I have followup?

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Oh, you have a --

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yeah, one followup question, if I could.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, sure, go ahead.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, with that -- with that in mind, and the best services provided to the child, in your opinion, doing this -- looking into this just recently, is there -- is it beneficial to have two separate

campuses, Solnit North and Solnit South? Or is it -
- would it be better to have one facility for these
children so that they have access to the greatest
amount of care in one facility, rather than having
the state's resources kind of split up between two?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: I think that's a fair question,
but they do serve different populations. So, the
North Campus is serving boys of a certain age, and
the South Campus is serving girls -- the PRTFs are -
- of a certain age. So, by having their advantages
to having two different -- there's always pros and
cons, right. So, the advantage are, you know, there
are a fair amount of parts, so one of the biggest
things we think about when a child needs intensive
psychiatric treatment is how accessible is that
treatment to where their families are, right. And
so, if I'm in Middletown, which is where the South
Campus is, you know, that's going to be accessible
for a certain radius of folks. And if I'm in your
neck of the woods, you know, that's gonna be
accessible for people in Enfield and in Windsor and
in Hartford. So, that's something we think about
too, you know, when we centralize everything it
becomes a little bit harder for some folks to reach.
You know, there's also the question of does it serve
these boys and these girls to have some gender-
specific programming in campuses. I think some
folks would say it does.

There are inefficiencies in having the state run its
own facilities. I mean, there's -- you know, like
labor costs are higher, other things are. I mean
that's just the reality of that, right, and that
both -- you know, that both helps and challenges,
right. Kids at Solnit North benefit from a

tremendous amount of resources that are being spent to -- to serve them there, and that -- those resources cost a fair amount of money. I mean there's no question for that. So, I don't know that I'm in a position here today to comment on is that the most efficacious use of state dollars. I do think it's a fair question. What we've been looking at most recently is do we have a structural statutory framework for knowing the quality of care that's provided, ensuring safe care is provided through outside licensure, and having a framework for communicating with the public when there are issues of concern. We did not have that. We are on the way to building that, and I think that will contribute then to the types of questions and answering the types of questions that I think you're raising.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, and I appreciate your -- your honest answer to those questions, 'cause sometimes we don't necessarily always get that, so I appreciate that. Thank you so much.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): So, thank you for your service to the state. I would say that the work that you're doing is a great task for anyone, so I truly appreciate it. Two quick questions. The first, in terms of public schools children, do you think that every child should be assessed for an ACE test or the Adverse Childhood Experience test?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: An ACEs test you're talking about? That's a -- that's such a good question. I

think -- I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head. I think it's very important that we're aware of how many children -- and adults frankly, working with children -- have adverse childhood experiences. I think when we're talking about universal screening, whether it's trauma screening or ACEs screening, you know, you get into tricky issues of parental consent and also into issue of what do you do with the information once you have it, right, which is something I hear from providers. If I screen a child for trauma, and they tell me certain things, I now have an obligation to do something with that information. And that may be the point, and that may be wonderful, so -- but I think the issue of universal screening on matters that are very sensitive to a child and family has to be done really thoughtfully. But I take the context of your question, being that -- you know, I'm assuming that sort of a growing awareness of how many of our children are living with a history of trauma or depravation, and our need as child-serving organizations, schools and otherwise, to be mindful of that and prepare to serve children in a trauma responsive and nurturing way. But, I don't know what I -- you know, I'd have to think about the implications of mandatory universal screening.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I think you've laid out what's been some of my concerns. So both having that information is important, I think both for instruction, support, so on and so forth, but to your point, when you have that information, don't you need to do that with that information. And whether it's about allowing the capacity -- so many things. So, I appreciate your answer. And then, just another one quick question. What help could

the Legislature provide your office and the Office of the Child Advocate.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: So, that's -- I appreciate that question. You know, I think we're -- the Office of the Child Advocate is very thinly staffed. I mean that's -- we never come here and ask -- we never go to our -- thinly staffed. You know, we never come to our Appropriations Subcommittee meetings and ask for personnel, however, because we know that's not the climate we operate in. And since I've been the Child Advocate, the state has been, you know, maneuvering the best it can through a series of durable fiscal challenges, let's call them. I think the other tension for our office is that, you know, we are always looking at systems that are underfunded. You know, so I think, am I gonna come and advocate for more dollars for DDS, or am I gonna come and advocate for more dollars for the Office of the Child Advocate? So, we have sort of made a decision to not ask for appropriation, but, since you asked -- look, the more -- we are very thin. We say no to things that I don't wanna say no to. We can't investigate everything that's worthy of an investigation. We are, including me, seven full-time employees who are overseeing, you know, enormous bureaucracies, both state and local. So, in our office, we do everything we can to stretch those resources, but sometimes more is more, you know. So, would I love another lawyer in the office? You know, I would. You know, I think the biggest need facing our office is that we have -- like many other state offices -- we have a couple of key folks who are on the verge of likely retirement in the next two years. And, as a very small office, it's challenging to plan for that without additional

positions. So, if I had my druthers, we'd have two more positions to prepare for the departure of two key positions, so we don't lose that enormous institutional knowledge to the detriment of our constituency, which is children and the public. So, having the resources to plan for succession planning and sustainability, I think, is a key need for our office.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And thank you for that candor. I mean, I know over the last decade the state of Connecticut has lost, or has not refilled, over 10,000 state employee jobs, where many of our surrounding states that are doing better economically have invested ["Right" in background] in these very important service jobs. And, when we look at some of the information and data that was presented, when we hear that there was, over the last three years, over 200 children that were referred unto as children that have been engaged in -- or not have engaged in but have been victims and survivors of trafficking. I think we need folks to say -- ring the alarm and say we need additional help and support to make sure that doesn't happen in our state. So, I appreciate your candor, and even if you can't directly advocate for it. I know at least I will help ring the alarm and say that we need additional support. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): It's an honor to be in front of you, Sarah. I think -- I chaired Children's in my first year as a senator and under Matthew Tirado, the incident, and it was devastating. I had no idea

that you would have to go through as much as you had to go through to uncover all the information that you did. But I understand that you've seen progress in the system, and part of that progress comes from the investigative report that you did to improve the lives of children, and I so much appreciate that because I think you've got a very tough job. And, as you said, you've got seven people. There's more work to be done. I think if we're gonna invest, we would be investing in our children as a priority and planning for the future of this transition of people leaving. But, as you look to where you started and where we are now, both on the negative and positive side, what has been what you think has been your greatest accomplishment that you've been able to see something happen and bring it to a case where you're seeing the change?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Thank you for that question, Senator Moore. Thank you for all your support on the work that we do. I really appreciate it. I do think that there's progress. Sometimes it's hard to always see it. I have some more in my written remarks about that. In the six years that I've been here, I think that I feel really good about all the laws we've been able to pass. You know, we've passed several laws we've helped lawmakers write, changing laws about restraint and seclusion. When I started as the Child Advocate, it was still in Connecticut law that you could put a child face down on the floor to restrain them for their own good, even though the federal government called that correctly a life-threatening restraint that restricts airway. That was still the law. You could do that in Connecticut to a child. You can't anymore.

It used to be that you could put seclusion into a child's education plan for their own good, even though our treatment facilities weren't allowed to do that. Even though the Department of Developmental Services doesn't allow its contracted providers to do that to adults, I could do that to a child. Connecticut data told us that the most likely child to be restrained and secluded in that matter was an elementary school aged child, young, black, and developmentally disabled, and our law doesn't permit that anymore. Those are enormous changes. It doesn't change practice overnight, it doesn't change culture overnight, and a lot of lawmakers worked hard to make those changes. But a lot of that emanated from an investigative report that the Office of the Child Advocate did and data that the Children's Committee demanded from state systems about these practices. So, I'm really proud of the role that our office could play in highlighting dangerous and traumatizing practices that remained in the educational system long after the mental health systems had -- decades had moved away from them, right.

I think the other thing I would say, Senator Moore, that really comes to mind is how many people, at least in my professional circles, talk about conditions of confinement for incarcerated youth. And sometimes I think about the resources that my office spends on juvenile justice issues and criminal justice issues, when there's a relatively small number of children who are incarcerated in adult facilities or have been incarcerated in juvenile facilities. But I strongly believe that that attention is so important and that public

discussion because I really believe that how we treat, as a society and as a state, the most vulnerable people in our community, and sometimes the people maybe we're least sympathetic to, is incredibly important and that conversations that this building has had around Whiting Forensic and around the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and around Manson Youth Institution are incredibly important to have so that we know we have transparency and accountability for all kids and all vulnerable adults. Because how we treat those folks, in some ways, matters almost more than anything. You could certainly make that argument. And so, while I don't have easy answers to what we do for all incarcerated youth, I am grateful that many folks in this building are talking about that and invested in looking at what we can do for kids who have needs in place of imprisoning them.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): So, following up on that, I'm now the vice-chair of Children's -- I can't seem to get away from birth to death, being on Human Service's and Children's, seeing the whole spectrum, where do you see the greatest need for us to make changes right now?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: For incarcerated youth [Coughing] in general?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Incarcerated youth.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: For incarcerated youth. Well, there's sorta -- this is the existential advocacy question for me, really. I think we need big picture -- I mean, if I'm being very candid here -- we need big picture sort of revolutionary change.

We do. I really believe that. And we need small picture immediate change. And what I mean by that is -- and I say this without any disparagement to my colleagues at the Department of Corrections -- they're role players too. They operate a custodial system of imprisonment, and they do the best they can to operate it fairly and with some service delivery within it.

That being said, Manson Youth Institution was built 40 years ago for 700 adolescents 14-21. You know, it's a generation-and-a-half ago where that was the public policy, to take kids who committed crimes in their community and incarcerate them in mass numbers. And I think, while we don't have consensus about all the remedies today, I think there is a fair amount of consensus that the mass incarceration of adolescents is probably not what we need to be doing, right. And the census at MYI is now less than half of that, right. And the number of boys under the age of 18 is dramatically lower than what it was because of a variety of juvenile justice reforms. But it still remains a level-4 max security facility for adolescents, and I submit, with all humility, that even though many of those youth have engaged in behaviors that caused them to be a danger to themselves and others, that they come into that facility with an extraordinary amount of need -- academic, emotional, social, psychiatric. And the revolution I'm talking about is we need to have a system that responds to that level of need, otherwise we're not changing any trajectories for those children. The number of children who are incarcerated that have nobody that comes to see them -- a four year old can't get better in a vacuum, a 15 year old definitely can't. They cannot change

the trajectory of their life without an invested adult, whether it's someone the state finds through kinship mapping or it's someone the state pays to be a mentor. They will not leave that facility and march to a better drum without somebody being invested and caring about them.

And while those sound like big changes, in some ways, the big changes are under consideration through this -- this Legislatures standing JJPOC, which I think is a good structure. Small changes can, in the interim, be made by having a state funded and supported mentoring system and kinship mapping framework for all kids at the deep end of the juvenile justice system, right -- making it easier for families to visit, making it easier for kids to be connected with caring adults. Those are things we could do now -- make -- pushing in more vocational support, pushing in second-shift programming, increasing educational resources. Those are budget options that could make a difference for incarcerated youth, while we consider what is the big picture change we wanna make. I know I just said a lot. You asked me that question. It's something I think a lot about.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): No, but I love it because, you know, [Coughing] as we look to 2021 and we start to build a budget, I mean, I've always been against dropping a money Band-Aid. I appreciate hearing vision and seeing where we need to get to and starting to build toward where we need to get to, and so maybe that is something that we think about for the next session, that we start looking at is there a way to build a mentoring program. I mean, it's not always about dollars, but it's also about

pulling in resources from other places. And, you know, I have some dollars in Bridgeport right now for youth gun violence prevention, and I'm not really seeing us do -- make decisions that's changing. It's just dropping money, and I am so against just dropping money and not seeing where you wanna get to. I know we need to do, I know it needs to get done, but what's the plan to get us there, right.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Two things I would say that I think -- I think could help: Educational case management. Kids have to have hope for their futures, right. Educational case management, meaning almost care coordination around a child's education. They cannot find their own way at that age. They need the help. And two, relationships/mentoring, which can be done through folks who work with kids to do kinship mapping to help them. I mean, DCF -- DCF, my colleagues from DCF over here have done a lot of work on our kinship mapping to help kids who don't have family find family. So, that can be -- that framework could be imported into our -- into some of our justice work, I think, as well along with paid mentoring.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Thank you. And again, I appreciate the work you do in a bipartisan way but also in a very positive way and engaging as many people as you can. It's never a negative when I talk to you. Even though you're facing all these other obstacles and things going on, you manage to come across as hopeful, and I think hopeful with works, I should say. So, thank you.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Moore. The -
- you know, I've been listening to all the
discussion, and I remember the IDD Caucus, and I
don't know if you were here when I was speaking to
some of the appointees to the State Board of
Education because, you know, we -- the special needs
kids, unfortunately we have a lot of these new sexy
model schools, which everybody points to and which
have a lot of corporate support, but they do very
little in terms of special needs kids.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Yeah.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And it's our neighborhood public
schools, the ones that really have to deal with that
population because, as you know, public schools are
there for everyone. You walk in, and you're
accepted into those. So, we have to keep that focus
and not lose -- not be simply sidetracked by new and
fancy models of education that may work for kids
that might've succeeded anyway.

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: Right.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And, you know, I was very happy
to see the Supreme Court struck down that procedure
that was being used by a school of using electric
shock with special needs kids, and finally the
Supreme Court ruled that that was unconstitutional
and they struck that down. I think it was only one
school that was doing it, but still, the fact that
one school was doing it was one school too many, in
my opinion. I know that -- that we've come a long
way from, you know, the 19th century, the
exploitation of children through child labor and

workhouse mills, and, you know, the orphanages that Dickens described, but in some ways it's disappointing when -- when you see the media and you see kids are being exploited, when you see what happened with the Boy Scouts of America, with the Catholic clergy, and all this. We've come a long way, but not far enough apparently as a society in terms of valuing kids and making sure that kids are safe. And I know you're doing your share. And just the fact that a new administration has reappointed you speaks volumes. You were initially appointed by Governor Malloy, and now Governor Ned Lamont has reappointed you, and that speaks in itself for the fact that everyone knows your -- your passion for what you do and that you're doing a good job. And, as you can see from the comments by Representative Perillo, Representative Davis, Yaccarino, Senator Moore, Representative Phipps, myself and that the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee is your fan club here, so. [Laughing] I really liked your response to Senator Moore about the fact that, as long as children have unmet needs, corrections is just a revolving door if those needs are met. So, thank you for your insights, and there's one question I have to ask of every nominee before I let them go. Is there anything in your past that you believe may prove embarrassing to either the state, to the governor, or to this committee?

SARAH HEALY EAGAN: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. This concludes -- well, unless there's somebody from the public that signed up to speak. Madam Clerk, no? Any written communications regarding any of the nominees? If not, that concludes the public

EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE
NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

hearing, and we'll call to order the business
portion of our meeting.