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**Testimony Concerning SB 174 and SB 177:
Implementing & Funding the Recommendations of the
Program Review and Investigations Committee
Concerning the Department of Children and Families**

Shelley Geballe, JD, MPH
Program Review and Investigations Committee Public Hearing
February 21, 2008

Dear Senator Meyer, Rep. Wasserman and distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am President of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families. Prior to co-founding Connecticut Voices, I practiced civil rights law, representing (among others) the state's abused and neglected children in the *Juan F.* litigation against DCF.

As the Committee report found, the *Juan F.* litigation has done much to increase the resources available to DCF. Further, on-going monitoring by the Court Monitor of DCF's performance against 22 specific outcome measures has helped improve DCF practice, including DCF's internal quality improvement programs.¹ Similar impacts from the *Emily J.* and *W.R.* court monitoring processes have occurred.

As the Committee's report also discusses, however, court monitoring is a "expensive and time-consuming endeavor." DCF must further enhance its *internal* processes for ensuring high quality care – and not only for children in the foster care system, but also for children with mental health needs and who are in the juvenile justice system.² This is particularly critical with regard to the monitoring of contracted services and addressing the identified inadequacies in its performance-based contracting, given DCF's extensive reliance on contracted providers to deliver so many of its programs and services.³

For these reasons, **with one exception**, we support the recommendations included in SB 174, but respectfully suggest the following revisions:

SB 174

General recommendation: Require that all plans, reports, status updates/reports, facility annual reports, committee meeting agendas and minutes, etc., that are required of DCF by state statute be posted on DCF's website (provided that any personally-identifiable information about DCF-involved children and families, if a part of any report, be redacted).

§1. Lines 40-44, clarify that funding "exceeds twenty million dollars" *in a single fiscal year*.

Lines 82-104, require that the strategic plan, quarterly status updates, and annual status report all be posted on the DCF website so the public has easy access (see general recommendation above).

§6. Lines 254-267. Restore a previous statutory requirement that youth be appointed to the State Advisory Council, by amending line 258 to add, after “at least one attorney” – “at least two youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who have been served by the Department.” Amend lines 270-272 to add youth to those whose service on the SAC DCF should support. As prior “consumers,” such youth would provide an invaluable perspective, as the experience in other states has shown. Past members of DCF’s Youth Advisory Boards could be good candidates for such appointments.

§12. We strongly support the idea of this pilot. However, to assure that children and youth (and their parents) can participate in the meetings convened by the court support services officer – as research shows is *very* important for success of whatever treatment plans are devised (“nothing about us, without us”). We urge that this language be added, “Whenever possible, meetings should be convened at times, and in places, that maximize the likelihood that children, youth, and their parents or guardians are able to attend.”

We oppose the proposal in SB 174, §10 to eliminate the requirement that DCF annually evaluate the progress and accomplishments of its unified school district. Youth in DCF care are at educational risk. Such a report could, and should, help assure that their educational needs are met. We would urge that this report not only be provided to the State Board of Education, but also to the General Assembly’s Education Committee, and be posted on DCF’s website.

SB 177. §1. We wholeheartedly support efforts to upgrade and integrate DCF’s data infrastructure across all bureaus and uses, as proposed by SB 177. However, we urge that this effort be explicitly linked to other state agency data upgrades to maximize inter-agency data operability, particularly with regard to data systems maintained by DSS (Medicaid), SDE (education), and the upgraded data system proposed in this bill for the Office of the Child Advocate. As noted in the Committee’s report, federal funding through SACWIS is available to move toward a web-based system, and through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (for up to 90%) for a system with interoperability with DSS, given the large number of children in DCF care served by Medicaid. The latter could allow DCF to track (through paid claims and/or encounter records) *all* of the health care actually being provided to the children in its care.

§3. We wholeheartedly also support an upgrade of the data system for the Office of the Child Advocate, but urge also the inclusion of funding for a staff position at OCA with training and experience in data analysis and research, so that the system – once operative – can be most effectively used.

We also urge, as part of SB 177, that funding either be included – or directed to be re-allocated – in DCF’s budget to address the Committee’s concern that DCF lacks adequate staff “with analytic abilities,” including requiring DAS to work with DCF to develop an appropriate job classification for staff positions within DCF to do research and analysis, and assist DCF in recruiting such staff.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

¹ As the Committee report noted: “[M]any areas of quality improvement strengths have been developed throughout the department in response to the *Juan F.* exit plan.” (PR&I, *Findings and Recommendations*, December 20, 2007, p. 31).

² Indeed, as the Committee report notes, the *Juan F.* court monitor reports a critical part of his role to be to “help DCF build its own capacity for quantitative and qualitative analysis and institute an agency-wide culture of results-based management.” (p. 43).

³ The Committee report notes, in this regard: a) that DCF’s monitoring of providers and implementation of contract requirements is “haphazard at best;” b) “no evidence” that monitoring staff “immediately address deficiencies in contractor performance, including poor quality of service, failure to perform all or part of the contract;” and c) “provider payment occurred regardless of satisfaction with the service provided.” PR&I, *Findings and Recommendations*, December 20, 2007, p. 33.