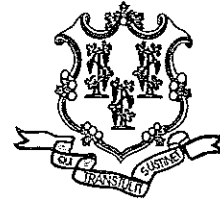




**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Public Hearing Testimony of
Commissioner Susan I. Hamilton, M.S.W., J.D.**

**Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2010**



Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Susan Hamilton, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families. With me today are various members of the Department here to assist me in answering questions from members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding the Governor's proposed budget adjustment for Fiscal Year 2011 for the Department of Children and Families. Over this past year, the Department, along with every other state agency, was challenged to meet its mandates while faced with the reality of diminishing resources. To assist us in meeting these challenges, the Department underwent a reorganization that streamlined its management through a Regional Office service model. This has resulted in more efficient management oversight and support to front line workers while decreasing the overall number of management positions in the Department by more than fifty.

In a broader context, it is notable that DCF entered this period of fiscal challenge at a time when key outcomes for children and families are dramatically and positively changing. A number of practice improvements and key investments in community-based services across all mandate areas over the past several years are giving rise to many of the outcomes we had all hoped to see. Today, families are more apt to receive services at home. Children are less likely to experience the trauma of a removal. Delinquency commitments of youth by our juvenile courts are down significantly. Access to a range of mental health services has dramatically increased with fewer children experiencing delays in discharge from services when clinically appropriate.

By way of example, as the result of the Department making more in-home services available, 80 percent of the children served by the Department on December 1, 2009 were living

at home compared to 62 percent on the same date in 2000 and 73 percent in 2007. Due to the Department's improved capacity to help families care safely for their children, approximately 20 percent fewer children are in out of home care today for abuse or neglect compared to two years ago. Due to investments in community-based diversion programs, delinquency commitments and recommitments have been reduced from 449 in calendar year 2004 to 299 in calendar year 2009.

These important changes in how we are serving children and families have permitted the Department to manage our recent budget reductions in a way that would have otherwise been more difficult. With this backdrop, I would like to address some of the major proposed changes to the Department of Children and Families' budget and highlight the context within which to view each reduction or reallocation.

First, a \$10 million reduction to the Board and Care Residential account is proposed. This reduction includes delaying the Safe Harbor program start up, eliminating contracts for services that have not fully produced the desired outcomes, modifying our Therapeutic Group Homes and Safe Homes to better meet the changing needs of the population we serve, and enhancing our utilization controls to increase efficiency in service delivery.

More specifically, the Department has analyzed the utilization patterns of our Therapeutic Group Homes and noted a lack of demand for certain specialized cohorts. As a result, the Department believes it will be able to close four group homes without causing a service void in this program area and reduce the budget by \$3.6 million. The Department also is reducing its unused capacity in the Safe Homes program and reusing a portion of the savings to enhance the clinical services delivered in the remaining homes to make this program more effective in meeting the intensive needs of children experiencing multiple disruptions from their foster care placements. In addition, the Department is seeking to redesign the Safe Home model to limit the admission of children under the age of six except under very limited circumstances and make every effort to place younger children in family settings whenever possible consistent with their best interests. This will result in a \$1 million savings in this program.

The proposed budget adjustment anticipates savings for the Department by having the Behavioral Health Partnership manage the Wrap-Around Services for one-to-one coverage. This change will introduce specific criteria for this level of service and permit better monitoring of one-to-one coverage, to determine whether other less costly treatment options are preferred to address a child's need.

Finally, this account is further reduced by the annualization of the \$2.5 million rescission implemented in this fiscal year. The Department has been able to sustain this funding reduction because of the decline in the need for residential services. Supported by the substantial increases in in-home and community based clinical services, there has been a 30 percent reduction in the number of children in residential care in just the last two years.

Next, the Governor's proposed budget adjustment increases and reallocates funding to accommodate implementation of the "Raise the Age" legislation. This includes a technical adjustment to move approximately \$3 million from the Department's Board and Care Residential account to the Juvenile Justice Outreach and Tracking account. This transfer will enable the development of community-based programs to produce successful outcomes for youth either remaining in or re-entering the community. These services include Juvenile Review Boards, Substance Abuse Recovery Supports, Education and Vocational Services, and in-home services. The proposed budget adjustment also adds an additional \$1.495 million to support the population increases projected at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. This increase will fund the staffing of two units currently closed, adding 36 additional treatment beds.

Third, the proposed budget adjustment adds \$2.8 million to assist in the implementation of the educational stability provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increased Adoptions Act of 2008. This federal legislation requires that children removed from their homes and placed in foster care be allowed to continue to attend their home school if that is in their best interests. The goal is to maintain a stable educational environment for the child, minimize the disruption of being removed from home and assist with the planned reunification with family when appropriate. The State receives in excess of \$100 million in federal reimbursement, which would be put at risk if the state fails to comply with this mandate. We estimate that 25 percent of

transportation costs tied to this Act would be able to be reimbursed to the State by the federal government.

Finally, the proposed budget calls for elimination of the Enhanced Care Coordination program for a savings of \$1.9 million. This step is being taken in light of the successful reduction in the number of children in residential levels of care and the reduction in the lengths of stay in these settings. Key to this success is the Behavioral Health Partnership's careful review of the need for residential care and the intensive case management provided by their staff to assure children do not stay in these settings longer than clinically necessary.

This concludes my testimony. I hope this information is helpful, and I look forward to our continued work together this session related to the budget, legislation, and other topics of interest to us both. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.