Testimony of the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut Legislature concerning the Commission on Children

February 18, 2009

I am Roberta Friedman, the Director of Public Policy at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University. The Rudd Center, directed by Dr. Kelly Brownell, serves as a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns, while holding industry and government agencies responsible for safeguarding public health. We are a leading research institution and clearinghouse for resources that add to the understanding of the complex forces affecting how we eat, how we stigmatize overweight and obese people, and how we can change. Much of our research is focused on childhood obesity prevention and we have been fortunate to work closely with the Commission on Children.

The Rudd Center strongly urges you to maintain the funding for the Commission on Children and to ensure its future. Its loss would reverberate deeply and widely at any point in time, and most especially in these difficult economic times when children are becoming even more vulnerable. The Commission's work is comprehensive, touching on all aspects of children's lives both at home, at school, and in the community.

Since our center opened in 2005, we have worked with the Commission and the Connecticut Childhood Obesity Council, created by the Commission and the Department of Public Health, on a variety of issues related to the serious and growing epidemic of childhood obesity in Connecticut.

Last November, Dr. Brownell gave the keynote address at a Commission forum which convened over 300 municipal officials, community leaders, health-care professionals, educators, business people, and families to discuss best practices and strategies to respond effectively to Connecticut's serious epidemic of childhood obesity.

We participated in a task force convened by the Commission and the Obesity Council to write a proposal for a centralized system for data collection and analysis to profile children's health, including body mass index. From that proposal came legislation that would help the state education and health agencies strategically address obesity prevention and control initiatives.

We also participated in a series of forums the Commission organized for municipal leaders in collaboration with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. It was an excellent opportunity to share promising initiatives to combat childhood obesity, and hear success stories from around the state.

As you can see, the Commission serves a crucial and multi-faceted role as a voice for children. It represents their needs in the State House and the Governor's office, developing cutting edge policy and working as an indispensable guide to legislators; it is

a resource and research center; it brings in much-needed federal dollars; and convenes a wide array of leaders and advocates in education, business, and government on behalf of children. It also works to empower parents to advocate for themselves.

As we conduct our research, and discover ways to have a positive impact on childhood overweight and obesity, we continue to rely on and highly value our relationship with the Commission and its Obesity Council, to help us educate policy makers, communities, families and other citizens, about making real change in the lives of Connecticut's children. We hope to continue to collaborate with the Commission, and the Obesity Council on a variety of issues, among them improving nutrition standards for school foods; ensuring all districts have strong wellness policies; and improving pre-school nutrition. We count on the Commission to serve as a critical voice in the legislature to help us convey the importance of strong, science-based obesity prevention measures.

We urge you not to sacrifice children's well-being in the present or the future, and to continue funding of this effective and important voice for Connecticut's children.

Thank you for allowing us to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

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