



**The Center for
Family Justice**

Testimony Regarding

**HB 5005, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30,
2021**

Department of Social Services

Appropriations Committee February 19, 2020

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHAIRPERSON:
Kathryn Maiolo
KM Solutions, LLC

Rosinne Chlala
The Festivities Foundation

Donna Craft
Community Leader

Pamela Dale
Attorney

Jill Fitzburgh
Community Leader

Rebeca Garcia
Bridgeport Police Department

Sofia Goncalves
People's United Bank

Chris D. Griffin
BNY Mellon Wealth Management

Anthony Iannini
Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP

Michael E. Lyngaas
Community Leader

Sarah Cwikla Mastropole
Stantec

Donna E. Milne
Community Leader

Kristen Okesson
Connoisseur Media

Matthew C. Reale
Attorney, Anthony & Reale

Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.
United Congregational Church

Lisa M. Todd
Webster Bank

PRESIDENT, CEO:
Debra A. Greenwood

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee. The Center for Family Justice provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

I am writing to urge your support of our request for funding under the Department of Social Services (DSS) to fully fund one full-time Child & Family Advocate in each of Connecticut's 18 domestic violence organizations, including The Center for Family Justice.

Last year we provided services to 89 children through advocacy and safe home services. Because our Child & Family Advocate is not a fully funded position (only 9 hours per week are funded) we must fund this position through other grant opportunities. In the end, because this is not a fully funded position, our Child & Family Advocate does not have the full amount of time ideally necessary to best meet the needs of the children and survivors they serve because their duties are split between multiple roles.

It is important that children who experience family violence in their home are provided a comprehensive and holistic approach that takes into account their different needs. Families benefit from services that incorporate a multi-faceted approach involving both large and small scale change. By working with the family unit, service providers gain greater insight into the level of violence experienced by all members of the family and can assist in the continuous development of age appropriate safety planning.

Currently our Child & Family Advocate utilizes a number of trauma-informed, evidence-based and resiliency-driven approaches to their work including the Devereux Early Child Assessment (DECA); Mom's Empowerment and Kid's Club curricula; play, music and art therapy, and child-specific responses to trauma and violence. The Child & Family Advocate will support the non-offending parent in identifying protective factors that will enhance the relationship with child(ren). Building protective factors are about helping to ensure the basic needs of the family are met, such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as connecting parents and children to various services they request.

One case that I would like to highlight is of 6 y.o. "Wilber". When Wilbur first came to our agency, his mom had just left her abuser who is Wilber's father. During their relationship, Wilber witnessed multiple violent incidents between his parents. His exposure to this violence, as well as his father's incarceration, caused Wilber to display behavioral changes at home and school. Wilber started to become verbally and physically aggressive with female classmates, as well as his mom.

When mom enrolled him and herself in the Center for counseling services, mom began to notice a change in her son. She reports he was starting to behave less aggressively toward females after seeking child advocacy services. He was also better at expressing his feelings and coping with the many difficult changes. During his sessions, he worked on a few topics that included identifying an

Hope Starts Here





**The Center for
Family Justice**

feelings, boundaries and communicating feelings, safety planning and making better choices.

Wilber was successful because there were child advocacy services to help him work through this extremely traumatic situation, as well as work with him and his mom together. All children who have experienced trauma should have access to services to help them process and overcome the trauma. Unfortunately, because of lack of funding, it is extremely difficult to provide all children and their families with the services they so desperately need.

Providing supportive evidence- and strengths-based resiliency services for children and the non-offending parent/survivor is paramount to the overall safety and stability of the family, but is not sustainable under the current funding structure. The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, of which we are a member, is requesting \$954,000 in state funding under DSS to support one full-time Child & Family Advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence organizations. We urge your support of this request as it will have a substantially positive impact on our ability to meet the needs of the children and survivors who come through our doors each year.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.
Director of Civil Legal & Court Advocacy Services
The Center for Family Justice
203-334-6154/aschlingheyde@centerforfamilyjustice.org
Serving Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe & Easton

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHAIRPERSON:

Kathryn Maiolo
KM Solutions, LLC

Rosinne Chlala
The Festivities Foundation

Donna Craft
Community Leader

Pamela Dale
Attorney

Jill Fitzburgh
Community Leader

Rebeca Garcia
Bridgeport Police Department

Sofia Goncalves
People's United Bank

Chris D. Griffin
BNY Mellon Wealth Management

Anthony Iannini
Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP

Michael E. Lyngaas
Community Leader

Sarah Cwikla Mastropole
Stantec

Donna E. Milne
Community Leader

Kristen Okesson
Connoisseur Media

Matthew C. Reale
Attorney, Anthony & Reale

Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.
United Congregational Church

Lisa M. Todd
Webster Bank

PRESIDENT, CEO:

Debra A. Greenwood

Hope Starts Here

