

Connecticut Commission on
Women, Children *and* Seniors



**Testimony before the Committee on Children of the General Assembly
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Executive Director
Commission on Women, Children and Seniors
February 7, 2017**

**Re: SB 637, An Act Establishing a Child Welfare Oversight Council
HB 6297, An Act Concerning Voluntary Placement in the Custody of the Department
of Children and Families and Parental Rights**

Senator Moore, and Senator Suzio, and Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) on the above referenced bills.

SB 637, An Act Establishing a Child Welfare Oversight Council

Under its authorizing statute, the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) carries the responsibility to focus its efforts on the following quality of life results for all children in Connecticut: that they are (a) healthy, safe and achieve educational success; (b) free from poverty; and (c) free from discrimination.

To carry out that responsibility, CWCS is mandated to, among other things, make recommendations regarding policies, programs and services, to advise the General Assembly concerning the coordination and administration of state programs that affect children, and to maintain liaisons with state and government agencies on behalf of children (Sections 131 and 132).

As such, CWCS supports the establishment of a Child Welfare Oversight Council, the purposes of which, as described in SB 637, would further promote positive quality of life results for our state's children in the primary custody of the Department of Children and Families.

Further, the activities of the proposed Child Welfare Oversight Council are aligned to and would benefit from the support of CWCS, which in its role as a non-partisan arm of the General Assembly functions, in effect, as the eyes and ears of the legislature with regard to children's quality of life. CWCS can also provide its support, research, coordination, and advice in promotion of the Council's goals. For this reason, it is respectfully requested that the Committee consider inclusion of the Executive Director of CWCS in the membership of the Child Welfare Oversight Council.

**HB 6297, An Act Concerning Voluntary Placement in the Custody of the Department of
Children and Families and Parental Rights**

CWCS supports HB 6297 and its purpose: to protect parental rights when a child is voluntarily placed in out-of-home care for the purpose of obtaining treatment for a mental health issue or developmental disability.

To promote the best quality of life for all children with special developmental or mental health needs, the support of the family is a necessity. While the engagement of out-of-home providers might be necessary to ensure the most skilled care available, parents remain necessary partners in determining the best interests of every child, and providing other supports that can only come from a loving family.

Even in contexts involving abuse and neglect, a lengthy process ensures that parental rights are not terminated except in the most extreme cases. To allow such termination in the case of parents whose only fault is a lack of skill in treatment is a gross injustice to both parent and child, and can only result in irreparable damage to the child's quality of life and future wellbeing.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today on these bills.