

**Testimony Opposing
Reduced Appropriations for the Department of Children and Families**

Kenneth Feder, Matthew Santacroce, and Sharon Langer, JD, M.Ed.

Appropriations Committee

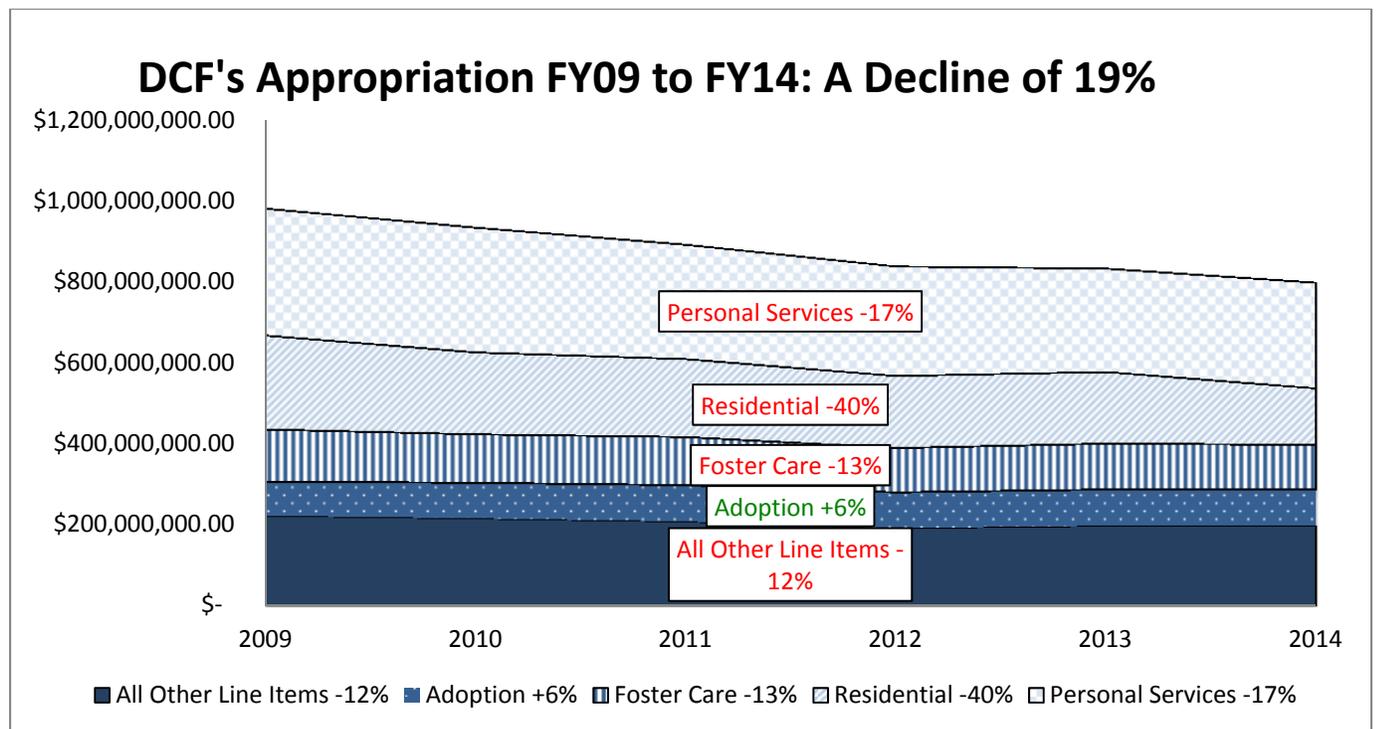
February 14th, 2014

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf 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.

Connecticut Voices for Children opposes the Governor's proposed \$11.7 million (-1.4%) reduction in funding for the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Over the period from FY09 to FY14, DCF's appropriation has fallen by \$183 million (19%) in inflation adjusted 2013 dollars.¹ Connecticut Voices estimates that over this period, cuts outweighed increases by 5 to 1.²



A series of recent reforms, coupled with a falling foster care population that mirrors a national trend, have helped make these reductions possible. These reforms include:³

- Diverting low risk cases away from foster care and toward community services;
- Relying on relatives to be foster parents whenever possible;
- Placing fewer children in congregate care settings; and
- Placing fewer children out of State.

Children do best in families, and these reforms have helped to keep families together and maintain at-risk children in the least restrictive environment of care, as is developmentally appropriate. *However*, the success of these reforms is dependent on sufficient reinvestment of saved funds in new programs that can adequately support children in family settings. In particular:

- With low risk cases diverted away from the department, every child who remains in DCF care has complex needs. Social workers require a lower caseload to meet these needs.⁴
- A robust array of community services must be available to meet the needs of families diverted away from the foster care system.⁵
- Relative caregivers often struggle with similar challenges to birth parents, and require specialized support.⁶
- Foster parents will need enhanced support to adequately care for the more complex children placed with them, who might previously have been placed in congregate care.⁷
- Research is shedding light on the need for reinvestment in previously poorly understood areas, among them transitional supports,⁸ support for homeless youth,⁹ and educational supports.¹⁰

Unfortunately, caseload standards have not been lowered. Furthermore, a growing body of evidence suggests that, to date, insufficient reinvestment has been made in all of the aforementioned areas of need, jeopardizing DCF's reforms. In fact, the most recent federal court monitor's report warns that to sustain recent reforms "the need to leverage additional savings gleaned from the reduction in use of congregate care services to increase community services is of paramount importance."¹¹

In order to adequately meet the needs of children in DCF care, Connecticut should begin reinvesting any further savings in:

- Lower caseloads for social workers;
- Enhanced community services;
- Increased support for kinship families;
- Increased support for foster families; and
- Increased programming in newly identified areas of need such as transitional supports, supports for homeless youth, and educational supports.

We encourage the committee to collaborate with the Department, DCF's court monitor, and the many advocates and community members who will testify this evening on the Department's budget, in identifying the highest priority areas of need, and begin reinvesting the \$11.7 million in savings achieved in FY14 in improved supports for DCF involved children and families.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

Contact:

Kenneth Feder
33 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 498-4240 x. 117
kfeder@ctvoices.org

¹ See, CT Voices' analysis of Monthly Reports of the State Comptroller – Budgetary Basis, 2009 – 2013. Available at <http://www.osc.ct.gov/reports/>. See also, Connecticut State FY14 & FY15 budget, available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/BB/2014BB-20130926_FY%2014%20and%20FY%2015%20Connecticut%20Budget.pdf. See also, FY 2015 Governor's Midterm Budget Adjustments, available at <http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2958&Q=539386&PM=1>. Fiscal year inflation rates calculated using CPI-U data publicly available through Bureau of Labor and Statistics' website at <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiat.txt>. Inflation forecasts from the Congressional Budget Office, publicly available online <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/43902>.

² *Ibid.*

³ See, “*Juan F. v. Malloy* Exit Plan, Quarterly Report, April 1 to June 30, 2013, Civil Action 2:89 CV 859 (SRU).” Available at http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/publications/pdf/2nd_qtr_report_2013_final_%282%29.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See, “*Juan F. v. Malloy* Exit Plan, Quarterly Report, January 1 to March 31, 2013, Civil Action 2:89 CV 859 (SRU).” Available at http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/positive_outcomes/pdf/1st_qtr_report_2013_final.pdf.

⁷ See, Jacob Siegel, “Increasing Retention of Connecticut’s Foster Families,” *Connecticut Voices for Children*. May 2011. Available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/cw11increasingretention.pdf>.

⁸ See, Kenneth Feder, “Testimony Regarding DCF Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care,” *Connecticut Voices for Children*. October 2013. Available at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/PRIdata/Tmy/2013ZZ-00000-R001003-Kenny%20Feder,%20CT%20Voices%20for%20Children-TMY.PDF>.

⁹ See, Derrick M. Gordon and Bronwyn A. Hunter, “Invisible No More: Creating Opportunities for Youth Who are Homeless,” *The Consultation Center, Yale University Medical School*. Available at <http://pschousing.org/files/InvisibleNoMoreReport.pdf>.

¹⁰ See, Kenneth Feder and Tamara Kramer, “Raise the Grade: Improving Educational Opportunities for Children in State Care,” *Connecticut Voices for Children*. January, 2014. Available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/raise-grade-improving-educational-opportunities-children-state-care>. Video of Connecticut Voices “Raise the Grade” forum is available through CT-N at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/raise-grade-improving-educational-opportunities-children-state-care>.

¹¹ See, “*Juan F. v. Malloy* Exit Plan, Quarterly Report, April 1 to June 30, 2013, Civil Action 2:89 CV 859 (SRU).” Available at http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/publications/pdf/2nd_qtr_report_2013_final_%282%29.pdf.