

**Testimony Supporting
H.B. No. 7148: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
Governor's Proposed Appropriations for the Department of Children and Families**

Lauren Ruth, Ph.D.
Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Lauren Ruth, and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support to the Governor's proposed funding for the Department of Children and Families in H.B. 7148: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

The Juan F. Consent Decree is the result of a 1989 federal class-action lawsuit filed against the state of Connecticut, calling for reforms to Connecticut's child welfare system to better protect abused and neglected children. The decree mandates that the state must provide the funding and other resources necessary to achieve the goals laid out in the consent decree exit plan.¹ In the past decade, the Department of Children and Families has made tremendous gains toward achieving the goals laid out in the Juan F. Consent Decree. In 2017, Connecticut negotiated a revised exit plan that reduces the 22 outcome measures established in 2004 to six outcome measures that remain to be met and eight that must be sustained.² The most recent status report indicated that DCF met and sustained four of the measures, and the court monitor marked five more measures as pre-certified for terminating.³

The remaining five outcomes that DCF must meet are fundamental goals of a child welfare agency: completing investigations in a timely manner; drafting case plans that are appropriate for the child and family and have been reviewed by a social worker supervisor; meeting the needs of children in care; social workers visiting in-home cases at least twice per month; and social workers maintaining—and not exceeding—a reasonable caseload.⁴

The Governor's proposed budget for FY 2020-2021 increases DCF's overall budget by \$20.3 million (2.6 percent) in FY 2020 and by \$35.1 million (4.6 percent) in FY 2021. These increases are necessary to help DCF meet the remaining goals that require funding.

The Office of Fiscal Analysis projects that DCF will run a net deficiency of \$4.7 million in FY 2019⁵ due, in part, to implementing the Juan F. Exit Plan, which required that DCF hire additional social workers and contract with needed community-based services to meet the needs of children and families in care. The final FY 2019 budget revisions failed to appropriate funds for these actions.⁶ *Because the Juan F. Consent Decree is a federal mandate, Connecticut must provide these services to children in care, even absent appropriated funding.*

The Governor's proposed budget factors these needs into its baseline funding and additionally includes \$9.1 million (1.2 percent of DCF's authorized spending in FY 2019) each year so that DCF can maintain community-based programming (including parenting education and supports, Multi-Systemic Therapy, Child Abuse and Neglect Intervention services, Child First services, among others)⁷ necessary to meet the needs of children under the Juan F. Consent Decree and to expand programming in geographical locations where services are lacking. The recent report by the Juan F. Court Monitor indicates that these services are likely to include dental screenings, substance abuse screenings, counseling for children, mental health screenings, and Area Resource Group consultations to provide clinical support to DCF staff.⁸ Services are so lacking in certain parts of the state—namely the northeastern and northwestern corners—that the Legislature's Planning and Development Committee is holding a public hearing regarding this issue.⁹ Expanding these services across the state is direly needed.

Besides having a federal mandate to provide appropriate funding to provide high levels of service to children under the care of the Department of Children and Families, Connecticut also has a moral mandate to provide this funding. The term *parens patriae* refers to the public policy under which a state may determine a child's parent is abusive or negligent; after taking this action, the state assumes responsibility for acting as the child's parent. For the 4,300 children who are placed in Connecticut's foster care system on any given day,¹⁰ this funding equates to visits to the pediatrician, money to support hobbies and after-school engagement, tutoring if they are struggling in school, and counseling to help them grapple with traumas that led to their involvement in the child welfare system and resulting from separation from their families. These are all items that are incumbent upon responsible parents to try to provide for their children. As the parent of these children, the State of Connecticut must prioritize funding these services.

We applaud the Governor for proposing a responsible budget that both achieves efficiencies through policy changes and commits the funding necessary so that children in are safe, healthy, and educated.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Governor's proposed appropriations to the Department of Children and Families in H.B. 7148. I can be reached with any questions at lruth@ctvoices.org or at 203-498-4240, ext. 112.

¹ Sirry, D. Ray. (December 2003). Juan F. v. John G. Rowland Civil Action H-89-859 (AHN). Rep. DCF Court Monitor. Retrieved from: http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/2004-01-05_ct_exit_plan.pdfhttp://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/2004-01-05_ct_exit_plan.pdf

² Mancuso, Raymond. (December 2017). Juan F. v Malloy 2017 Revised Exit Plan Civil Action 2:89-cv-00859-SRU. DCF Court Monitor. Retrieved from: <http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Revised-Exit-Plan.pdf>

³ Mancuso, Raymond. (February 2019). Juan F. v Malloy Exit Plan Status Report Civil Action 2:89-cv-00859-SRU. DCF Court Monitor. Retrieved from: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/Positive_Outcomes/pdf/Status-Report2nd-Quarter-2018--3rd-Quarter-2018-final.pdf?la=en

⁴ Mancuso, Raymond. (February 2019). Juan F. v Malloy Exit Plan Status Report Civil Action 2:89-cv-00859-SRU. DCF Court Monitor. Retrieved from: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/Positive_Outcomes/pdf/Status-Report2nd-Quarter-2018--3rd-Quarter-2018-final.pdf?la=en

⁵ Office of Fiscal Analysis. (2019, February). Report on Agency Deficiencies. Connecticut General Assembly. Retrieved from: https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/PROJ/2019PROJ-20190225_February%2025,%202019%20Agency%20Deficiencies.pdf

⁶ Silbermann, R., et al., (2018, June). Impact of the Final FY 2019 Budget Adjustments on Children and Families. Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/2018_06_11_Final%20FY%202019%20Analysis%20FINAL.pdf

⁷ Dwyer, K., and Della Pietra, R. (2017, January). Summary of the Revised Juan F. Consent Decree Exit Plan. Connecticut General Assembly Office of Legislative Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2017/rpt/pdf/2017-R-0023.pdf>

⁸ Mancuso, Raymond. (February 2019). Juan F. v Malloy Exit Plan Status Report Civil Action 2:89-cv-00859-SRU. DCF Court Monitor. Retrieved from: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/Positive_Outcomes/pdf/Status-Report2nd-Quarter-2018--3rd-Quarter-2018-final.pdf?la=en

⁹ House Bill 5642: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Examine a State Funding and Service Disparity in Northeastern Connecticut.

¹⁰ Luczak, S., Nelson, J., & Ruth, L. (2018). Who I Am, Where I Belong, and Where I'm Going: Promoting Positive Identity Development for Youth in Connecticut Foster Care. Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/YatC%20report%20FINAL.pdf>