



DATE: Monday, January 30, 2017

TO: Appropriations Committee

FROM: Brunilda Ferraj, Senior Public Policy Specialist

RE: S.R. 8 / H.R. No. 9: RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT IN JUAN F., ET AL. V. DANIEL MALLOY, ET AL.

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Brunilda Ferraj, Senior Public Policy Specialist at the Alliance. The Alliance is the statewide organization representing more than 500 community nonprofits in CT. Our members provide life-sustaining services that improve the quality of life of more than half a million adults, children and families.

I am here to comment on S.R. 8 and H.R. No. 9, which would approve the provisions of the Juan F. settlement agreement. The agreement would hold the Department harmless from budget cuts until the Department is no longer under federal oversight and require an additional \$6.3 million for mental health and substance abuse programs for children and families.

State budget projections for the coming years show that true economic recovery may take significantly longer than we'd hope for and it's possible that the state may not see robust revenues for many years to come. That means programs that serve some of the most vulnerable children of our state will continue to be the target of budget cuts – unless you approve the agreement before you today.

Nonprofit providers of children's services have been struggling to operate with inadequate funding for more than a decade, at a time when demand is on the rise and the state grapples with an opioid epidemic that's taken a grave toll on families and children across the state. If we do not safeguard children's services from budget cuts, we will jeopardize the gains the State has made over the past three decades and risk destabilizing the system altogether, leaving some of our most vulnerable kids and families with nowhere to turn.

It is our understanding that the approval of this agreement does not strip the legislature from having oversight of DCF. In fact, we strongly believe that the legislature can and should continue to hold the Department accountable. Reports by the DCF Court Monitor, Office of the Child Advocate and more recently the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services all highlight the Department's failure in meeting the needs of children in its care. Further, it's important to note that the six unmet measures, including "children's needs met," are some of the most serious outcome measures of the Juan F.

settlement and the primary reason the state is under federal oversight. It's clear the Department still has a long way to go to ensure that all children are healthy and safe, but stripping it of resources now would only hamper the State's progress in addressing these deficiencies.

As we move forward, the Department should work in partnership with the nonprofit community to ensure that the remaining outcome measures are met and that nonprofits have the support and resources to serve all children in need. Nonprofits possess knowledge and expertise in the delivery of services to children. They are a part of the solution.

Protecting the funding of one set of human services should not result in fiscal harm to programs that serve other needs. Such an approach to balancing the state budget would harm children and families, as programs of the social service delivery system are linked – cuts to one service area would often negatively affect another. For example, we must ensure that youth aging out of DCF care are met with the appropriate support services at DMHAS or DDS. If those services are not in place, we risk undoing the progress the youth has made while in the care of DCF.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and I urge you to support S.R. 8 / H.R. 9.

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