

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
JOINT COMMITTEE
RE: DCF OPERATING PROCEDURES
DECEMBER 18, 2008

Good morning Senator Harris, Senator Meyers, Representative Villano, Representative McMahon, and distinguished members of this joint committee. My name is Thomas Gilman; I live at 204 Mack Rd. in Lebanon, CT. I've spent my entire career working in the field of human services. I retired in 2003 after working for DCF for 28 years including 5 years as an agency deputy commissioner. I have a Master's Degree in Child Welfare and I am currently a member of the Southeastern Connecticut Mental Health System of Care and a board member of FAVOR a family advocacy organization.

I am here today, however, speaking strictly as a private citizen and not as a spokesperson for any group or organization.

I would like to commend the committee for the amount of time and energy that has been devoted to this very important issue. I have watched parts of each of the previous three days of testimony. While impressed by your tenacity, I am concerned that you are not receiving the type of comparative and objective information that will lead you to make carefully reasoned judgments. You have heard a broad range of anecdotal information, both positive and negative. Yet I have seen little in the way of analysis and the hearings have been missing any insight that would come from authorities in other jurisdictions that have actually managed an organization similar to DCF.

Usually when an organization is evaluated it is either judged against an industry standard or compared with like organizations. I have seen no evidence that this method is being used here or even contemplated. Rather it seems that an idealized, mythical, standard is being applied.

The fact that we are here today holding hearings does not surprise me. In the 28 years that I worked for DCF, I don't remember a time when the Department and its commissioner have not been under review. I fully understand that it is your responsibility to maintain a watchful eye on the services provided by state agencies, but also please understand that this is neither new nor unique to Connecticut. A national review will show that similar agencies are also under constant scrutiny. And for better or worse, the political reality is that as of the late 1990's the average length of tenure for a commissioner was about 19 months, barely time to learn the job.

Clearly, I do not in any sense disagree with your goal to improve the lives of the children under the jurisdiction of DCF. I do worry, however, that these hearings have not enhanced the lines of communication with the people who can help you; the people who work beneath the headlines and have dedicated their lives to this profession.

Therefore, I have a few thoughts to offer, and respectfully, a few suggestions to make that I hope you will consider before you take any action.

- Talk with former commissioners; both in and outside CT, about their experiences, they've all been fired so they will have time to talk to you and presumably have a lot to say.
- Do a root cause analysis of the problems that you encounter.
- Find out the advantages of a consolidated agency; there is plenty of national data, review it.
- Consider that regardless of the entry point, mental health, child protection, or juvenile justice, that when a youngster enters DCF care their needs are often very much the same.
- Learn more about DCF and its daily challenges, from field staff.
- Understand that there are miracles at DCF as well as tragedies.
- Develop with DCF, a realistic set of standards to judge success.

Because of what it is tasked to do, DCF will never be an agency that the public naturally embraces, but if we are realistic in our expectations and objective in our assessment, the department and the children they care for will be better served.

Thank you.