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Thank you, committee members, for allowing me this brief opportunity to address all of you.

My name is Michael Mackniak and I am the executive Director of Guardian ad Litem Services, a non-profit 501c3 entity with headquarters in Naugatuck. Our collaborations with Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Probate Court Administration has resulted in the creation of Melissa's Project – a nationally recognized program working with persons with severe and persistent mental illnesses who are maintaining meaningful lives in the community.

Our unique combination of monitoring and reporting has demonstrated dramatic reduction in recidivism rates of adults with mental illnesses. Hospital admissions and ER visits are dramatically reduced under our model and the need for criminal intervention, arrests and incarceration is almost non-existent.

Nowhere is there a greater need for a comprehensive, collaborative approach to the delivery of effective services than to the plight of Connecticut's Children.

Such an approach would ensure that our kids and their families are closely assessed and an individual plan for positive family growth can be designed.

Such an approach would ensure the realistic attainability of such a "family plan" and include the goals, dreams, values and cultural interests of each family unit.

Such an approach will ensure the active participation of social service agencies which are mandated or contracted providers of services.

Such an approach will provide accountability on the part of the participants from the service provider community.

Such an approach will provide the necessary oversight and accountability of all participants by including an independent monitoring and reporting component.

Such an approach will be Proactive as opposed to Reactive. It will keep children and their families outside of the purview of the already overburdened state agencies.

With collaborative approaches including that which created Melissa's Project, we have seen that private sector agencies can partner and include state agencies in the most efficient delivery of services to all of our most "at need" populations. These collaborations necessarily include the families we seek to assist.

Working closely with families, schools, community organizations, churches, hospitals and other groups, our model will develop a comprehensive plan which includes all of the participants along most of life's continuums.

Together, collaborative, community based teams will work for the common goals set by each family in careful consideration of their specific needs. Collaborations will be established appropriate to each individualized family plan. Referrals will be made and services will be sought all for the common purpose of maintaining the family unit.

In their Article entitled Pathways from "Traumatic Child Victimization to Delinquency" Dr Julian Ford, Dr John Chapman and Judge Michael Mack recognized that the separation of children from their parents or care providers CAN BE, in itself a traumatic experience. The emotional impact upon these children can contribute to delinquency and further psychological detachment.

In recognizing this, any child who is offered the support and understanding of their emotions and social processing stands a much greater chance of avoiding the pitfalls of trauma and becoming a productive member of our communities. These children, in turn, represent the positive impact that early intervention can and will have and fosters hope in others. (Julian D Ford et al, Winter 2006 , *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* p 13-26)

Unfortunately, there have been too many stigmatizing events surrounding DCF which shroud it, however incorrectly, in a cloud of mistrust and/or apprehension. Most families who would benefit from the comprehensive services offered through DCF would go to any length possible to avoid that agency.

Further, accessing voluntary services through state agencies, if viable, is such a daunting task that most individuals are intimidated just by the intake package. Add to this the frustrations of the referral process and the back log and wait lists associated with services, and the result is families in need simply not availing themselves of potentially useful and fulfilling means' of assistance.

The application of a program operating under the Guardian Model and in partnership with existing state agencies such as the Connecticut Children's Trust, Regional Children's Courts as well as schools, community organizations and private entities will enable us to identify and take a Proactive approach to the assistance of families in need.

A partnering program such as the one described will minimize or, in some cases ameliorate, potential harm which will often require long-term, future intervention by DCF, Juvenile Court System, DOC and DMHAS.

The most profound impact on children in need is a collaborative approach of private sector and state agencies seeking to maintain and empower the family unit.

Communication is key in the development of comprehensive, realistic and attainable family plans.

Coordination of all agencies, institutions and individuals involved in the lives of our children is imperative in ensuring the successful implementation of planning among disparate service providers.

Thank You