

JOINT INVESTIGATION ON DCF:
Testimony of Alesia Maltz, Ph.D.
18 December 2008

I would like to thank the Chairs, Co-chairs, and Members of the Children's and Human Services Committee for providing an opportunity for citizens to speak at this hearing.

My name is Dr. Alesia Maltz. I have been licensed as a foster parent for four years and have served as a pre-adoptive foster parent for the last two and half years. There has been ample evidence already presented at this hearing that DCF is compliant neither with the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, nor The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. While the focus of this investigation has been on the most egregious offenses, I believe that the logjam of problems associated with DCF can best be broken by focusing, as both the Convention and Act state, on the best interest of the child.

DCF cannot be permitted to repeat the same mistakes. Decisions need to be taken by DCF and the courts in a timely and decisive manner. I know children who were sent back to foster parents five times from failed attempts at reunification. In my review of the academic and policy literature, I have found that:

1) The CT definition of "best interest of the child" is inadequate in many respects, when compared with definitions of the other 49 states. (For a state-by-state summary, see,

www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/best_interest.cfm.)

2) The academic research shows that children do best when they are not returned to the birth parents but remain either with foster parents or adoptive parents. (See, for example, the packet of academic articles I left with Representative Anne Ruwet.)

3) The law, policies, and procedure at DCF promote and sometimes require, reunification with birth parents even when it is not in the best interest of the child.

The Connecticut Legislature can address the important issue of streamlining the adoption process by maintaining a clear focus on the child. I propose the following changes be made so that our children no longer be abused and neglected by DCF:

1) The Connecticut Legislature should review and redefine best interest of the child in terms of the latest research and in light of the best practices of other states.

2) The Connecticut Legislature should review the law, policies, and procedures between the courts and DCF to enhance timely decision-making in light of the best interest of the child.

3) Limits and consequences should be set on the number of chances birth parents have to prove they are responsible to their children. For example, if the birth parents fail to demonstrate the necessary improvements required by the courts after the requisite 15-month period, they should not be given more and more chances. At that point, the best interest of the child should be weighed more fully than all other criteria in the permanency plan.

These changes will save many children from getting stuck in the DCF system. Thank you for consideration of my testimony.