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December 18, 2008

The Honorable Jonathan Harris  
The Honorable Peter Villano  
The Honorable Edward Meyer  
The Honorable Faith McMahon  
Room 2000  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee and Select Committee on Children:

My name is Michelle Scarlett and I have been a therapeutic foster and adoptive parent since 1999. My initial placements were through Waterford Country School, and that is where I was first introduced to my son, Kenan. He has been with me since he was 4 ½ and he is now 11 years old.

I learned early on that when you become an advocate for children, you do not win popularity contests! It is time consuming, expensive, and exhausting to try and pick up the pieces of shattered lives. My firm belief is that we must pay now, or pay later. I do not wish to imply that children are commodities, rather that they are fragile creatures and will not recover without caring intervention from competent individuals.

Like most children suffering from loss and trauma, Kenan had many obstacles to overcome. Many professionals held a rather bleak outlook for this child due to his extensive neglect and abuse. Thankfully, he had Jo-el Suroviak in his corner. Jo-el was the DCF social worker assigned to him and his siblings. She had a very realistic approach to his treatment, but remained positive and celebrated our small victories.

Through no fault of his own, Kenan was a very difficult child to reach. Jo-el went out of her way to find every opportunity available to him. If it wasn't for her, he would probably not be in public school. She plead our case to the DCF educational advocate at the time, Kate. I will always be thankful for Jo-el, Kate, and his court appointed attorney, Bruce McIntyre for their extensive support during our darkest times.

Kenan is now an honor roll student at East Lyme Middle School. His strengths are in French, Art, and Science. He wants to be an engineer or a basketball player when he grows up. He stops by his principal's office daily just to chat for a few minutes between classes. He is involved in after school activities, basketball, and 4-H. He still trusts children more easily than adults, but the fact that he is able to trust anyone is an accomplishment. He was featured on the front page of The Day on January 1, 2007. He was chosen by DCF as the child who has made the most progress in foster care.

I am extremely grateful for Jo-el, and those like her, who put their lives in danger, face heartbreaking scenarios daily, and still find the inner strength to do their best to break the cycle of abuse.

On a final note, I would like the public to know that often times when a child is returned to an abusive home, it is because a judge made that decision based on information available at the time. A social worker can only make recommendations, not the final call. Also, I have witnessed social workers being polite and respectful towards the very people who either hurt their children, or put them in danger. I feel DCF does not get enough credit for their professionalism in dealing with families in crisis.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Scarlett". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Michelle Scarlett