

June 10, 2009

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Commissioner Susan Hamilton  
Connecticut Department of Children and Families  
505 Hudson Street  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Commissioner Hamilton,

We write on behalf of the Youth Law Center, a public interest legal advocacy organization working on behalf of children, youth and families involved with the nation's juvenile justice and child welfare systems. One of the Youth Law Center's primary goals is the elimination of the use of congregate, shift care for infants and young children. We have worked with child welfare directors to end the routine and accepted use of this practice in several jurisdictions around the country including Nevada, Utah, California, Florida and Arizona.

We were concerned to learn of the high rate of use of congregate care for young children in Connecticut, particularly in SAFE Homes, ostensibly for evaluation or to keep siblings together. We know you have made successful efforts to reduce the length of stay for these children; nevertheless the underlying problem of placing young children in congregate care at all persists.

Research confirms that young children are harmed even by short stays in congregate care, with no counterbalancing benefit in eventual stability of placements or maintenance of sibling groups. The jurisdictions we have worked with have found they were able to eliminate the use of congregate care for young children by making a commitment to do so and instituting some critical changes in practice, although they initially thought that the use of shelters and other congregate facilities was necessary.

We understand from conversations with the Court Monitor and others, that you share our concern about congregate care and would agree that it is critical to ensure that every child under age 6 who must be removed from his or her parents home is placed in a home with a consistent primary caregiver. This would eliminate not only shift care, but night to night stays and any other practice that interferes with the child's ability to form a healthy attachment. We hope that you would be willing to make a firm commitment to meeting this goal.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue with you. We will be in Connecticut on August 4 and would like to arrange a meeting for this purpose.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Carole Shauffer  
Executive DirectorAlice Bussiere  
Staff Attorney