



## State of Connecticut

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July 23, 2015

Senator Dante Bartolomeo  
Assistant Majority Leader  
Co-Chair, Children's Committee  
State Capitol Room 011  
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Representative Diana Urban  
Co-Chair, Children's Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Room 4042  
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Dear Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban:

When you voted to reconfirm Department of Children and Families Commissioner Joette Katz's nomination, you expressed that you believed Commissioner Katz was acting in good faith and that she had improved the department immensely regarding children's mental health treatment and protections. After reviewing the report from the Office of the Child Advocate released yesterday, I believe it is clear you were misled, and the situation at DCF is actually worse than we thought.

In light of the findings of this new report, which focused on DCF's two juvenile justice facilities: the CT Juvenile Training School (CJTS) and Pueblo Unit, and on top of the long history of Commissioner Katz's autocratic leadership and misplaced priorities, I am asking that she resign from her position as commissioner. Given that you were also unaware of the extent of the abuse, mistreatment and lack of transparency within DCF's locked facilities, I would like to know if you will stand with me today and support my call for her to resign so that DCF can move forward.

The blatant abuse of children at DCF's locked facilities, and DCF's failure to investigate many of these cases, is abhorrent and inexcusable. Even more sickening is that this is not the first time we are hearing about mistreatment and a failure of the system under Commissioner Joette Katz.

**Commissioner Katz has failed to address persistent concerns about the safety of children in both CJTS and Pueblo Unit.**

- Despite concerns raised by, among others, the Center for Children's Advocacy, Connecticut Voices for Children and our own state Child Advocate, the Commissioner forged ahead with the development of Pueblo Unit, a new high security prison like facility for juvenile girls. It only took a few months for advocates to raise concerns regarding the increasing number of children being incarcerated and the rising use of violent physical restraints in DCF facilities. In September 2014, the Child Advocate took the unprecedented step of reporting DCF for child abuse based on the repeated use of violent "prone restraints" at Pueblo. The report released today confirms multiple cases of abuse which were underreported.

- In response to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School Advisory Board's recommendations in 2014 to increase transparency, institute an independent ombudsman and review, and implement new quality assessment tools, the Commissioner rejected their proposals. In addition, she terminated the Chairman of the Advisory Board and decided to 'reconstitute' the board with handpicked members.
- The Commissioner failed to implement recommendations made in a shocking report from Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform regarding DCF's locked facilities. After failing to implement many of the most substantive recommendations, she commissioned another report with a hand-picked consultant.
- The Commissioner also failed to support legislation put forward this year to implement the recommended changes supported by the Child Advocate and the CJTS Advisory Board. These included efforts to:
  - a) create a new independent ombudsman to give children incarcerated at CJTS and Pueblo a voice and a safe place to report complaints,
  - b) improve transparency and increase public access to the department's records,
  - c) increase the independence of the CJTS Advisory Group,
  - d) require an outside independent agency to review the department's child protection policies and procedures, and
  - e) implement a nationally recognized quality assurance program to allow DCF to better collect and report data.

**Commissioner Katz has blindly sought to reduce caseloads and residential placements at all costs, including the cost of child safety.**

- The Child Advocate's Child Fatality Report released last year notes the "unprecedented" number of child homicides involving children who should have been protected by DCF. In many cases, DCF seems to have ignored multiple known risk factors, such as drug abuse and a known history of family violence, in order keep the child in the home and avoid out of home placements. "Family preservation" should be the goal of effective child protection policies that keep children safe, not a policy in and of itself. Instead, Commissioner Katz placed "family preservation" above actual child safety.
- The dismantling of Connecticut's residential treatment system and the rush to "de-institutionalize" children with no effective plan to meet their needs is causing serious harm to the very children DCF is obligated to serve and protect. Children with serious mental health needs are showing up at hospital emergency rooms at alarming rates and often languishing for days because they have nowhere else to go. Connecticut Children's Medical Center reports that the number of children with mental health needs spending multiple nights in the ER has tripled since 2010. Yale-New Haven Hospital reports that many children are admitted to the ER five or six times a year as parents struggle to find appropriate services.
- As part of her effort to improve her residential placement statistics, the Commissioner has used her authority to deny out of state placements and effectively veto all out of state placement recommendations, even when supported by the children, their representatives, social workers and juvenile court personnel. Ignoring the best interests of the child, she has forced children to remain in inadequate in-state facilities where their condition actually worsens and then released them into the community with no safety net in place.

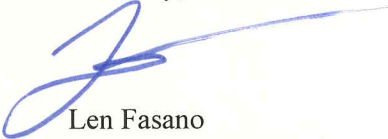
Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban  
July 23, 2015  
Page 3

- As reported in the most recent court monitor report, under Katz' leadership, DCF has consistently failed to meet 7 critical quality benchmarks, up from 6 in 2010 before she took office. DCF's performance on these standards has actually deteriorated on her watch. For example, the court monitor found that DCF developed adequate treatment plans for children only 47.2% of the time compared to 86.5% in 2010 and also successfully met children's needs only 47.2% of the time compared to 67.3% in 2010. DCF failed to meet 306 identifiable needs of children in its care. This is a more than 30% increase from just last year and a 125% increase or more than twice the number of unmet needs in 2010.

I find this long history of mismanagement and failure to protect some of the neediest children appalling. I hope you will support my call for the commissioner to resign. The safety and well-being of Connecticut's children depend on reforming the system. Commissioner Katz has repeatedly blocked the needed reform and transparency.

I'm sure you agree with me that it is impossible for any person of good conscience to read this report and not want to take immediate action to resolve these issues. Therefore, I hope you will join me in asking for Commissioner Katz to resign.

Sincerely,



Len Fasano  
Senate Minority Leader