



**Testimony of Paul Dworkin, MD- Pediatrician and Executive Vice President for Community Child Health
at Connecticut Children's
to the Children's Committee regarding
SB 6, An Act Concerning Resources and Support for Infants, Toddlers and Disconnected Youths**

March 4, 2025

Senator Maher, Representative Paris, and members of the legislature's Children's Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my support of SB 6, An Act Concerning Resources and Support for Infants, Toddlers and Disconnected Youths.

My name is Dr. Paul Dworkin and I serve as the Executive Vice President for Community Child Health at Connecticut Children's. Before commenting on the bill, I want to provide some background about our organization. Connecticut Children's is a nationally recognized, 205-bed not-for-profit children's health system driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 3,200 employees and more than 1,300 pediatric experts on our medical staff, we are the only health system in the state dedicated exclusively to the care of children. While we provide access to the most specialized pediatric care, we also know that only about 10% of children's overall health and wellbeing is determined by the access to and quality of the health care services they receive. For this reason, Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health works to improve the wide variety of factors that influence a child's health (often referred to as "the social drivers of health") such as housing, early care and education, transportation, family support services, and food and nutrition.

At Connecticut Children's, more than half of our patients rely on the state's Medicaid program as their source of insurance coverage. As such, we are keenly aware that a family's finances influence their ability to access care and services for their children. All too often, we see families who lack reliable transportation to travel to medical appointments, cannot afford all of their utility bills, or struggle to purchase healthy foods for their family.

The issues raised in SB 6, specifically sections 9 through 12, are of critical importance to ensure the optimal health, development, and wellbeing of children and youth and is of particular relevance to the current behavioral health crisis and the devastating impact on families and society. It has broader implications for such priorities as workforce development, equity, safety, and community stability and security. We encourage support for SB 6 to ensure that all families have access to resources that strengthen their capacity to promote their children's optimal health, development, and well-being; elicit their concerns for their children's development and behavior; and link families and their children to desirable, effective, community-based programs and services

Connecticut has exemplary, community-oriented resources and state models that have the capacity to strengthen families and communities to promote children's optimal outcomes. However, such resources are most often operating as siloed programs. Resources, programs, and initiatives must be embedded within comprehensive, integrated systems of care.

At present, we are squandering the opportunity to strengthen families and communities to promote optimal health, development, and wellbeing. Importantly, the issue is not primarily the need for more funding to enhance resources, but rather the imperative of collaboration and integration of efforts across all sectors critical to achieving outcomes. We must elevate efficacious models (e.g., Office of Early Childhood's Help Me Grow CT, Department of Public Health's Care Coordination Collaborative) to scale and impact to strengthen families and communities to promote the optimal health, development, and wellbeing of all children and youth.

As the founder of Help Me Grow, a comprehensive, integrated approach to developmental promotion, early detection, and referral and linkage of vulnerable children and their families to community-based resources, I am proud that successful pilot study of the model in Hartford in the late 1990's led to statewide dissemination of the model, originally through the State's Children's Trust Fund and, more recently, the Office of Early Childhood. Our Help Me Grow National Center at Connecticut Children's now supports the dissemination of the model in more than 30 states and 140 systems across the nation. We must ensure that all Connecticut families have access to the model and to its portal of entry, 211 Child Development. SB 6 importantly calls out the need for all families to receive information on how to access this critical resource.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Christian Petersen, Connecticut Children's Government Relations Manager at cpetersen@connecticutchildrens.org.