NATASHA M. PIERRE, ESQ.
State Victim Advocate

Testimony of Natasha M. Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Committee on Children
Thursday, February 5, 2015

Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. For the record, my name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Proposed Senate Bill No. 303, *An Act Concerning Children Exposed to Family Violence*

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) fully supports Senate Bill No. 303 as it will establish a task force to evaluate existing policies and procedures among agencies that may interact with children exposed to family violence and to develop a state-wide model policy for use by those entities when responding to children exposed to family violence.

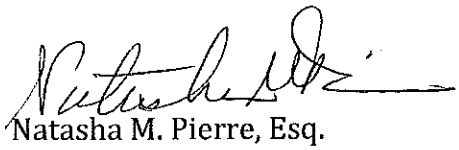
There are roughly 40,000 family violence arrests each year, occupying nearly one third of the criminal dockets throughout the state. It is reasonable to assume that either children were present during the incident that led to an arrest and/or have been exposed to family violence at some level prior to an arrest. In cases where a family violence arrest has occurred, the criminal court's primary focus is to address the defendant's criminal conduct while respecting the rights of the victims of family violence, including children. Although the criminal court enters orders to protect the victim, including any children present during the incident, it is the agencies and entities outside of the criminal court, such as the Department of Children and Families that will have the greatest impact on a child's ability to recover from the traumas associated with family violence. A state-wide model policy must reflect and consider the rights of victims as entities respond to and engage with children exposed to family violence.

To ensure that the State constitutional and statutory rights of victims are not lost in the development of agency policies and procedures, the OVA respectfully requests that the Committee include the State Victim Advocate to the membership of the Task Force. As the

OVA is mandated to evaluate the policies and procedures of those entities providing services to crime victims[1], it is practical to include the State Victim Advocate on the task force.

I strongly urge the Committee's favorable report of Senate Bill No. 303. Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



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[1] C.G.S. § 46a-13c(1)(3) Responsibilities of the Victim Advocate