

House Human Services Committee

February 17, 2016

RE: H. 622 - An act relating to obligations for reporting child abuse and neglect and cooperating in investigations of child abuse and neglect

Chairperson Pugh and Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of H622. This bill clarifies a provision of last year's Act 60, by allowing mandated reporters who reasonably suspect abuse or neglect of a child, and who have reliable information that the same incident of suspected abuse or neglect has already been reported to DCF, to not make a report to DCF *if the mandated reporters are reasonably certain that they have no new information to add.*

I provide mandated reporter training in partnership with DCF-Family Services. Last year I trained over 600 people, primarily in Chittenden County. Additionally, my organization, KidSafe Collaborative, working with DCF, recently completed the development of an on-line training for mandated reporters, which includes information about mandated reporters' legal obligation to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

I have heard, over the past 7 months since the passage of Act 60, from many many mental health providers, social services agency staff, educators, child care providers, and others that the current law as written does not increase child safety. Removing the previous "cause a report to be made" provision does not result in more reports of actual suspected abuse and neglect, but rather causes them to make reports about which they have no direct knowledge and results in duplicative reporting, while at the same time creating an onerous burden for them.

The situations they describe most often are team meetings, where one person shares information about suspected abuse/neglect of a child and then all feel they now must report it, even if they have no first-hand knowledge; or more often, a supervisor who obtains second, third or even fourth-hand information and also by law now must report this. This has resulted in a "CYA" mentality about reporting, far from the intent of the law which was, of course, to increase child safety.

Additionally, this process causes DCF Centralized Intake staff to be spending time taking reports that are duplicative, and when these reports are accepted DCF-Family Services staff conducting the investigation or assessment have to take a tremendous amount of time figuring out who has direct knowledge and who is just reporting, or adding their name to a report, but has no first-hand information. This not only does not increase child safety, it *decreases* it as attention could and should be better spent responding to reports from people with direct knowledge about and suspicion of abuse/neglect.

I do not believe that DCF would *not* receive reports of child abuse or neglect if H622 is passed into law. Rather, they would receive more accurate and useful reports. It would be incumbent upon mandated providers who have second-hand information or ancillary information to make sure that *everyone* with direct knowledge of a situation reports their concerns; if they can't verify that a report has been made, they would still have an obligation to report. And unlike the situation(s) which led to the change in the mandated reporting law in the first place, mandated reporters will have to take steps to ensure that they are *reasonably certain that they have no new information to add*.

Furthermore, the provisions of this bill should not be limited just to hospital and medical providers – this should be the case any time there is duplicative information, as the change to the law has affected many mandated reporters across disciplines. I encourage passage of H622 as it is written.

Thank you.

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KidSafe Collaborative: working *together* to end child abuse