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**OFCO TESTIMONY ON HB 2263**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**  
**Monday, January 23, 2012**  
**House Hearing Room A, John L. O'Brien Building, 3:30 p.m.**

Good afternoon Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2263. My name is Mary Meinig and I am the Director of the Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman ("OFCO").

While OFCO remains neutral on specific proposed legislation, I support the intent of HB 2263 to reinvest savings resulting from reductions in foster care into child welfare programs to strengthen and preserve families and improve outcomes for children. This legislation helps address a child welfare financing structure which has placed an over-reliance on out-of-home placement and underfunded alternative services to support families and protect children.

Approximately 90% of federal funds dedicated to state child welfare programs can only be used to pay for foster care placements.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, under the current system, when a State succeeds in reducing foster care caseloads by reuniting families or establishing a permanent home for a child, the State typically loses federal foster care dollars. This financing straightjacket creates an over-reliance on foster care rather than investing in alternative services that might help children safely remain with or return to their families.

By re-establishing Title IV-E waivers, States may now apply to use federal foster care funds in a more flexible manner. This, along with creating a Child and Family Reinvestment account as proposed in HB 2263 could provide services which have proven to reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect and preserve families. For example, in order to reduce the number of children entering foster care, Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) deliver in-home services to needy families, avoid

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<sup>1</sup> Of the \$7.2 billion in federal funds dedicated for child welfare in 2007, \$4.5 billion supported children in foster care placements and \$2.0 billion was for support payments of children adopted from foster care. TIME FOR REFORM: INVESTING IN PREVENTION: KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AT HOME (2007) Available at: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/2263.pdf>

out of home placement and safely keep children in their home. IFPS programs that adhere closely to the “Homebuilders” model significantly reduce out-of-home placements and subsequent abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup>

Another in-home service -the Nurse-Family Partnership, has been shown to cut child abuse and neglect by nearly 50 percent and also significantly reduced the number of a child’s emergency medical care encounters.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of complaint issues we receive at OFCO involve the separation and reunification of families and the safety of children living at home or in substitute care.<sup>4</sup> HB 2263 will direct funding to provide necessary services to improve outcomes for children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our testimony on this legislation.

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<sup>2</sup> INTENSIVE FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAMS: PROGRAM FIDELITY INFLUENCES EFFECTIVENESS—REVISED, Miller, Marna (2006). WSIPP evaluation estimates that such programs produce \$2.59 of benefits for each dollar of cost.

<sup>3</sup> Nurse Family Partnership: Preventing Child Abuse, available at: <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/proven-results/Preventing-child-abuse-and-neglect>

<sup>4</sup> OFCO 2011 Annual Report (p. 25), available at: [http://www.governor.wa.gov/ofco/reports/2011/ofco\\_2011\\_annual.pdf](http://www.governor.wa.gov/ofco/reports/2011/ofco_2011_annual.pdf)