



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
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**OFCO TESTIMONY ON HB 2331**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Friday, January 20, 2012**  
**House Hearing Room D, John L. O'Brien Building, 1:30 p.m.**

Good afternoon Madame Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2331. 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 this legislation to enhance our reporting requirements of suspected child abuse and neglect and better protect the children of this state.

Currently, state law mandates that certain professionals, but not others, report suspected child abuse or neglect to law enforcement or CPS and also requires that adults residing with the child report suspected severe abuse.<sup>1</sup> This patchwork approach to reporting suspected child abuse or neglect can lead to confusion as to what must be reported and by whom. More importantly, it ignores the reality that as a community, we all share responsibility for protecting children from abuse and neglect.

- This legislation affirms that all capable adults have a duty to report cases of suspected severe child abuse or neglect to CPS or law enforcement.
- Named professionals would still have a higher duty to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

At OFCO, we have seen cases where an adult "non-mandated reporter" took the initiative to report concerns to law enforcement or CPS, and quite literally saved a child's life. For example in September 2011, store clerks noticed a 10 year old child that appeared emaciated, with a sunken face and had a gash on her arm. The clerks also observed the adult with the girl being verbally abusive. The store clerk acted on their

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<sup>1</sup> RCW 26.44.030

concerns contacted CPS, and as a result, law enforcement conducted a welfare check on the child.

Law enforcement discovered that the child had whip marks on her stomach and chest. The child later disclosed multiple accounts of abuse and torture including beatings with a cord, belt and wire and being burned with a cigarette. Doctors found that she suffered from severe malnutrition and had multiple bruises, abrasions, burns and scars all over her body.

The child was placed in foster care and the adult caregiver has been charged with first-degree assault of a child and first-degree criminal mistreatment. She faces more than 10 years in prison if convicted.<sup>2</sup>

HB 2331 reflects the reality that as a community we expect all adults to take action to protect a child from severe abuse or neglect. HB 2331, coupled with continued public education on when and how to report suspected child abuse and neglect will strengthen our ability to protect children.

OFCO strongly supports the spirit and intent of HB 2331.

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

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<sup>2</sup> [Girl, 10, Tells of Reported Abuse and Torture](http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20110920/NEWS01/709209909), By Diana Heffley, Herald Writer, Published September 20, 2011. Available at: <http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20110920/NEWS01/709209909>