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TESTIMONY ON SB 5281
WSIPP Study of Safety Assessment Tool

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES and CORRECTIONS
Monday, February 4, 2013
Senate Hearing Room 1, J.A. Cherberg Building, 10:00a.m.

Good morning Chairman Carrell and members of the committee, my name is Mary Meinig and I am the director of the Family & Children's Ombudsman ("OFCO").

While OFCO remains neutral on specific proposed legislation, I support the intent of this legislation to direct the Washington State Institute of Public Policy to study the validity and reliability of the safety assessment tool used by the department in child welfare cases.

Assessing the safety of a child is obviously a key component to each child welfare case and is a driving factor when making crucial decision such as: whether to remove a child from the home; establishing an appropriate safety plan; or whether to return a child to the parent's care. It is essential that the assessment tool used by the department is effective and consistent with the guiding principles described in Children's Administration policies¹, including:

- Decisions on child safety are based on comprehensive information, logical reasoning and analysis and are not incident-based or reactionary.
- The safety decision making process must include a continuous assessment of present and impending danger throughout the life of the case.
- A focus on safety must be maintained from the initial assessment through case closure using required tools to assess, control and manage safety threats.
- A decision to place a child in out-of-home care is a safety decision. This level of intervention is only justified when it is clear that child safety cannot be controlled and managed in the home.
- Conditions for return home are designed to ensure that children are returned when no safety threats exist or an in-home safety plan can be implemented and sustained.

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

¹ CA Practices & Procedures Guide, Sections 1100 and 1120