

## Questions for the Child Advocate Nominee

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### Child Advocate ([CGS § 46A-13K et seq.](#))

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is a division within the Office of Governmental Accountability but acts independently.

The child advocate's duties include:

1. evaluating the delivery of services to children by (a) state agencies and (b) entities that provide services to children with state funds;
2. reviewing agency procedures to protect children's rights;
3. investigating complaints concerning any state or municipal agency providing services to children and any entity that provides services with state funds and, when indicated, advocating on behalf of the child's best interests;
4. recommending changes in state policies concerning children including in juvenile justice, child care, foster care, and treatment;
5. taking all possible actions to ensure the legal, civil, and special rights of all children; and
6. providing technical training to attorneys representing children and guardians ad litem the court appoints.

### Questions

1. What do you see as the most pressing needs of Connecticut's children and youth?

2. Many of our child welfare laws are based on the concept of “best interest of the child.” What does this phrase mean to you?
3. You have served OCA as deputy child advocate since 2022 and most recently as interim child advocate. What other professional experience has helped prepare you to take this post?
4. One of the child advocate’s responsibilities is to review state agencies’ procedures for providing services to children, with a view toward promoting children’s rights. What rights do you believe children have? How do children’s rights balance against their parents’ or caretakers’ rights?
5. In your written [testimony](#) before the Committee on Children on one of the committee’s child welfare bills ([HB 5004](#)) this session you stated, “OCA’s review of [the Department of Children and Families (DCF)]’s internal quality assurance has consistently raised concerns for the adequacy of safety practice, adherence to policies regarding information gathering and supervision, and service delivery.” Over the years your agency has repeatedly found issues with DCF’s practices and policies. Do you see any recent improvements with that agency? If not, how can change be made?
6. By law, the child advocate must recommend changes in state policies concerning children, including changes in juvenile justice, child care, and foster care. What policy changes do you believe are most important at this time?
7. A [February 2026 report](#) from OCA and Disability Rights Connecticut found that Connecticut special education students placed in out-of-state private placements experienced overuse of restraint and seclusion and had a concerning number of injuries that could not fully be explained. Additionally, it found a lack of oversight from the State Department of Education (SDE) and the students’ home district in Connecticut. The report called the lack of oversight “a serious gap in ensuring the safety and welfare of Connecticut’s most vulnerable students.” The report included numerous recommendations including documenting all instances where restraint and seclusion is used and requiring SDE to review all contracts with out-of-state schools for compliance with federal and state laws. How have SDE and local school districts responded to the report? Is legislation necessary to make these changes?
8. Under state law, OCA administers and facilitates [the State Child Fatality Review Panel](#). This panel must review the circumstances of the death of any child who has received services from a state department or agency addressing child welfare, social or human services, or juvenile justice. The panel has existed for more than 20 years. Can you identify any trends or issues that have surfaced over this time with child fatality cases? Is there something the state is failing to do to address them?
9. The 2023 child fatality report in the case of two-year-old Liam Rivera found failings on the part of DCF, the Judicial Department’s Court Support Services Division, and the Office of the Chief Public Defender. OCA made numerous recommendations for changes in all three agencies. In December 2024, OCA issued an [addendum to the report](#) to “provide additional information regarding how the state agencies addressed or are addressing individual and

systemic issues...” Each agency reported taking steps or had plans for improvement. For example, DCF said it would create the new position of director of child safety practice and performance and the public defender’s office said it would hire 20 social workers to support legal counsel assigned to child protection. Can you tell us the status of these plans and whether you think they have made a difference?

JM:ms