



State of Connecticut
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

September 13, 2023

Representative Liz Linehan
House Chair, Committee on Children

Senator Ceci Maher
Senate Chair, Committee on Children

Dear Co-Chairs Linehan and Maher,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding operations at the Short Term Assessment & Respite (STAR) Home in Harwinton, a shelter for at-risk girls that is run by Bridge Family Center—a Department of Children and Families (DCF) contractor. A September 10 media [report](#) published by CT Inside Investigator detailed shocking allegations of violent incidents involving both minor residents and staff, including assaults, sexual assaults by staff and residents, and sex trafficking. These problems, and others detailed by the report, expose a chaotic and dangerous environment both for staff at the facility and the children under their care.

Members of the legislature, and the public, deserve an official accounting of what has transpired in Harwinton as well as more detail about the process DCF uses to secure vendors such as the Bridge Family Center, including the policies and procedures governing oversight of these group homes.

To that end, we hereby request that the Committee on Children, which has cognizance of all matters relating to the DCF, hold an immediate informational hearing on this topic. Participants in this hearing should include:

- DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes and relevant agency staff
- Representatives from Bridge Family Center
- Municipal and emergency services officials from the Town of Harwinton

What's alleged to have occurred at the STAR Home is completely outrageous and unacceptable, and we look forward to working with you to improve oversight of these programs and to ensure that juveniles are appropriately placed where they can receive the level of care they need.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Vincent Candelora
House Republican Leader



Anne Dauphinais
House Ranking Member – Committee on Children



Lisa Seminara
Senate Ranking Member – Committee on Children



Lezyle Zupkus
Representative 89th District



Henri Martin
Senator 31st District



John Piscopo
Representative 76th District