

To: Senate Committee On Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery
From: Jon Eames, on behalf of Youth, Rights and Justice
Re: **Support for SR 201, In memoriam, Kathryn Weit, 1947-2021**

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Anderson and members of the committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice (formerly known as the Juvenile Rights Project) joins the many other advocates for children and families and the members of the disability community in honoring a true champion, KW through the passage of SR 201.

Founded in 1975, JRP began representing youth in delinquency cases in juvenile court and gradually expanded our work to include federal court class actions, juvenile dependency cases, legislative advocacy and representation and advocacy in education matters, including special education. It was during the early 2000's in connection with the latter two areas of work that we had the tremendous good fortune of working with Kathryn.

YRJ established the SchoolWorks program in 2002 to advocate for the educational needs and rights of our clients. As part of that work, we began what became a two-session effort to reform the public school residency requirements to allow children in foster care, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, to avoid the multiple school placements that were occasioned by their multiple moves in foster care (a separate and equally damaging practice YRJ lawyers also addressed). Although the lawyers leading that work, Brian Baker and Angela Sherbo, were knowledgeable about the scope of the problem and had ideas for statutory changes, they were novices at legislative advocacy. Enter Kathryn!

Kathryn was indispensable throughout the four-plus years that went into the ultimate passage of HB 3075. She was an ally, colleague, collaborator, mentor and friend. Her advice and insights were invaluable. Her example a shining one. Despite her own massive workload, she took calls from the YRJ lawyers at all hours, never once indicating that they might be interrupting work of her own. And, she initiated calls on issues that might well have been missed by the relatively inexperienced YRJ lawyers. She provided introductions to legislators and their staff to whom YRJ would not otherwise have had access. Based on the source of the introduction, YRJ enjoyed the respect and attention of the relevant legislators. In this respect, YRJ benefitted greatly from Kathryn's reputation; she was widely known and universally respected for her knowledge, professionalism, integrity and passion.

In addition to advice and access, she was a role model. She had a deep and ever increasing knowledge of her subject matter, both from the research and from her own experience and those of her friends, colleagues and the countless families whose lives were made better as a result of her work. She combined a never-give-up, never back-down ethos with the skill of an almost pitch perfect negotiator; she advocated for change in a calm, professional, compassionate and personal way. It was both enlightening and fun to work with her.

YRJ staff and former staff who worked with her were enriched by those experiences and have and will miss her.