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SB0156

Children	8, 11-12, 33-40, 50-52, 55-64, 72-74, 81-83, 99-119, 130, 133-134	54
House	7826-7829, 7852-7854	7
Senate	1851-1856, 2299-2303, 2490	<u>12</u>
		73

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**SELECT
COMMITTEE
ON
CHILDREN
PART 1
1 – 318**

**2012
INDEX**

happy to have you on this committee and we really look forward to working with you.

At that same time, I would also say that we are missing Representative Hamm and we hope and pray that she is doing very well, but we know that Representative Rose will be a great addition and will help us get good things done for children. So welcome, Representative.

And now I'll turn it back to my cochair to get us going with, I believe it's COMMISSIONER JOETTE KATZ.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Yes, thank you, Representative Urban.

Our first person to testify is Commissioner Joette Katz of the Department of Children and Families.

Welcome, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER JOETTE KATZ: Thank you so much. And if it's okay I'm -- I brought with members of the Department who can answer questions and if it's all right with you I'd ask them to have a seat.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, yes. Please proceed.

COMMISSIONER JOETTE KATZ: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. I'm Joette Katz, Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families and I'm here to offer our support on several bills on your public hearing agenda.

The first three bills that I will address were introduced by DCF and I thank the committee for

SB192
HB5185
HB5217
SB156
SB157
SB193
HB5186

years to show good cause for removal. Under the proposal good exists when the applicant has been rehabilitated, the person has accepted personal responsibility for the acts or omissions that resulted in his or her being included in the registry in the first instance, a bonafide need to remove his or her name and at least two supporting letters are submitted from competent adults. DCF must develop the application and include space for the applicant to specify the basis for his or her good cause claim. The applicant is entitled to a contested case hearing if DCF denies the request and those whose applications are denied can reapply every two years indicating on each subsequent application good cause that has arisen since the last application.

Section 14 reveals a property conveyance concerning property owned by DCF at the former Long Lane School in Middletown. This conveyance was originally enacted in 1999 as part of Legislation concerning the construction of the Connecticut Juvenile Training Facility. While most of the former Long Lane School property was transferred to Wesleyan University, these properties were to be conveyed to the City of Middletown. At the request of the city this conveyance has been amended twice, in 2005 and again in 2009, but now the city is not interested in finalizing the transaction. DCF requests that this property conveyance be repealed so that the property can be disposed of in accordance with standard surplus state property requirements.

Regarding other bills on your agenda today, DCF supports Senate Bill Number 156 which is AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. We concur with the important of this -- of this Bill to

ensure consistent and meaningful visitation of siblings in the care of DCF when they have not been placed together. The Department has worked with Connecticut Voices for Children in the development of this proposal and we appreciate the willingness of the proponents in deferring the effective date in order to allow a sufficient time to permit us to modify our sibling visitation practice and policies. I would also point out that a resolution concerning sibling rights was adopted last month by the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors which we supported and I've included this resolution in our testimony.

The Department also supports the intent behind Senate Bill Number 157, AN ACT REVISING THE DEFINITION OF A CHILD CARE FACILITY TO CONFORM WITH THE DEFINITION OF A CHILD. The Bill revises the statutory definition of child care facility in Section 17A-93 of the General Statutes to conform with the definition of a child. This definition relates to those congregate care facilities licensed by DCF. This change is intended to be consistent with provisions of Raise the Age law and it would permit a youth up to 21 years of age who are in school or a job training program to be placed in a child care facility without requiring that they had -- that he or she had been placed in -- in a congregate residential setting prior to his or her 18th birthday.

We also support Senate Bill Number 193, AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATED REPORTERS AND REQUIRING CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD CHECKS FOR YOUTH CAMP EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS. Last month I testified before this committee and the Judiciary Committee and said that athletic coaches on all levels including youth and collegiate who have had -- who have a great

work with the proponents on tightening up the language.

KELLEY MOORE: Yes, I did.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Okay, good. I thank you for that.

Are there any comments or questions or discussion?

If not, thank you very much for coming today.

KELLEY MOORE: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next is Jamey Bell, Connecticut Voices for Children testifying on Senate Bill 156.

JAMEY BELL: Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children. I'm testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children. I'm Jamey Bell, the executive director.

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports Senate Bill 156, CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

While -- when it's not possible for the Department to place siblings together, DCF should provide for frequent and regular visitation between separated siblings. Essentially the law requires that when it's possible siblings be placed together. However DCF has consistently failed to meet its obligation due to various reasons to place together and most recently the federal court overview process overseeing the Department found that DCF was in need of improvement in

HBS186

order to meet the federal standards for sibling placement.

So in cases where siblings are separated, brothers and sisters should have the right to consistent visitation. For children in foster care as for all children, relationships with brothers and sisters are some of the most important and longest-lasting relationships in their lives. We have six different foster youth here who are going to present testimony to you today so I'm not going to even go into the reasons that that's so important. Not that we don't all intuitively understand it as well.

Senate Bill 156 would enable siblings separated by DCF to visit one another a minimum of once per week on average unless such frequent visitation is not in the best interest of each sibling. Under DCF's current policy there's no consistent standard for visitation between siblings who have been separated due to parental abuse or neglect. Many young people in DCF's care report visitation only once a month or in some cases even less frequently. A dozen or so years ago when I was a child protection attorney for a long time that was the case with most of my clients who were separated from their siblings and their placements.

Increasing sibling visitation is consistent with best practices in child welfare and with the direction of the Department. The once a week baseline is consistent with -- with best practices which aim to create a sense of normalcy by requiring frequent and regular contact between siblings.

Currently, DCF is introducing practice changes which have the potential to transform the agency's operation and improve the services

provided to children and families. So we're very confident that these practice changes -- changes will allow DCF to place more siblings together and to place children in closer proximity when they have to be separated.

Therefore, achieving once a week sibling visitation by the date in the Bill October 1st, 2014 is a reasonable expectation for the Department. Also it's important to note that the law allows the Department to waive the once a week minimum baseline in any case in which such frequent visitation is not in the best interest of the child, that's always the legal standard that needs to be applied.

The Bill directs -- further directs DCF to meet with members of the DCF youth advisory boards to gather additional suggestions for -- strengthening sibling rights. Year after year, siblings -- I mean DCF's youth tell us various problems that are -- that arise in the sibling -- visitation context in addition to not being able to see them, such as being withheld for punishment, not having the right to see them for significant birthdays and holidays and --

SENATOR GERRATANA: Jamey, can you summarize your testimony.

JAMEY BELL: Yes, I certainly will. I was done. That was the last point I wanted to make.

In addition I just want to say that we also support House Bill 5186, ACT ADOPTING A FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS. Thank you very much.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you and I certainly appreciate your testimony and it sounds like I was looking at the Commissioner's testimony also. Sounds like you, your organization and the Commissioner have gotten together to talk

about this and looks like the effective date would be in 2014 to actually enact the whole program.

JAMEY BELL: Discussed this proposal with the Commissioner prior to suggesting it to the Legislature and the Commissioner was in agreement with the concept and thought that with the very laudable changes that she's making in the -- in the structure of DCF and its programs that this would be achievable by -
- by that date.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Good.

Senator Suzio.

SENATOR SUZIO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly totally and completely support the intent of this. My question is since this seems to be a byproduct of an inconsistent policy within DCF, do we actually need a statutory remedy or should it be just a policy change at DCF? Why would we want to just -- why would we go so far as to change the law if in fact DCF itself recognizes the shortcoming?

JAMEY BELL: Well, that's a good question and it is theoretically possible that a policy, a simple change within the Department could have the same result. However, as a policy advocate I tend to think that Legislation that is as important to this -- as this and protects fundamental rights such as this for children to family integrity which is essentially a constitutionally protected right, that his kind of policy should be reflected in the law of the state, it should be a value that is reflected in Legislation and not simply in policy which could be changed given various changes in administration, et cetera.

SENATOR SUZIO: Thank you very much.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Senator.

Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

How does, or what does DCF do to arrange this -
- propose to do to make these once a week
visits happen? And are there any -- well,
maybe this is for the Commissioner later on,
but is there going to be any additional
financial obligations or costs to accomplishing
this goal?

JAMEY BELL: Well, I'm not the best person to answer
that question, but my idea then, what we have
discussed with the Commissioner and this, and
these kinds of changes that the Department is
making is that first of all the structural
changes will make it less likely to have an
additional cost because more children will be
with their siblings so there will be fewer
children who need to be transported to visits
but also the idea is that -- they will be
closer so it will be much easier all around to
make these visitations happen.

Furthermore, I think that the idea is that if
this is just like any other expectation on a
weekly basis that kids have, like they go to
therapy once a week, they go to -- they might -
- their music lessons or soccer practice or
whatever they go, that that's just an
expectation that's built into the structure for
payment for that child's care when he or she is
in foster care and that the Department -- the
case aides if they have those or the foster
parents can take it on like they do the other
essential and very, very important kinds of

services that children need to have as normal a life as possible.

It's -- it's -- we really have to change the baseline and change the thinking that this is not a luxury, this is as important as seeing your therapist and as important as seeing your parent if visitation with a parent is in the best interest.

So we think that once it is more normalized, the costs will be absorbed and come into line with the other kinds of costs that are incumbent in taking care of these kids in these situations.

REP. BETTS: Well, I totally support this, but the question I have is who is responsible for arranging, for example, the transportation for the siblings to get together. You know, is it the Department? Is it the foster parents? Or how does that happen and how has that happened in a -- in a consistent way?

JAMEY BELL: Well, DCF as -- as the statutory parent is responsible for arranging for either to do it itself or to arrange with the foster parent to make it happen or with older foster youth and some of them are -- are -- that is the situation for a lot of them, they could do it themselves if they had a bus pass, if it was close enough. But essentially the DCF is responsible for making it happen and paying for it as the statutory parent.

REP. BETTS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Representative.

Any other questions or discussion?

If not, thank you so much.

JAMEY BELL: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next to testify is Joan Kaufman from Yale University School of Medicine on Senate Bill 156.

JOAN KAUFMAN: And if it's okay, I'd like to make a comment. Is it Senate Bill 5217 where the thought is to take people off the list of child abuse neglect?

SENATOR GERRATANA: Yes, 5217, the Department did, I think it's in Section 8 or 9 or 11, but that's the one.

JOAN KAUFMAN: If it's okay I'd like to just add a comment on that one as well but.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Sure, absolutely. Just, you know, I'm sorry, administratively we do need to have people introduce themselves before they give testimony, if you would do so and then go for it.

JOAN KAUFMAN: Sure. My name is Dr. Joan Kaufman, I'm a child clinical psychologist. I am also a federally-funded research study -- researcher studying risk and resiliency in maltreated children and on faculty in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine.

In terms of Senate Bill 156, should children in care have an opportunity to see their siblings on a regular basis, I think if any one of us were to ask our mothers our mothers would say of course they need to see their siblings on a regular basis. But speaking as a professional, what we do know is that when siblings are separated from one another they are increased risk for experiencing depression, anxiety,

problems with anger. We also know separation from siblings increases the likelihood of there being disruptions in adoptions and foster care placements. The presence of positive stable supports is the most important factor in promoting resiliency and siblings is a part of that network which helps to promote resiliency, positive adaptation in children.

So without a doubt it is clinically indicated. If it is clinically indicated it is in the best interest of the child to work to try to support visitation on a regular basis.

If there's questions on that or let me just move forward. I don't see the two issues as being totally parallel. Taking someone off the child abuse list to allow them 20 years later to parent, be a grandparent and take care of a grandchild versus to be employed. When a parent -- a grandparent might become a caregiver for a child, it's a family decision and the family members are making it knowing the history of prior abuse, addiction and are making an informed consent.

HB5217

If I'm sending my child to a camp without that knowledge of someone's past, it's not an informed consent and to me it's not a parallel situation. And as a professional I would -- it's hard to really make that full evaluation whether or not someone relapses is the rule not the exception.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you for that comment on -- well, actually your comments on both Legislation.

Are there any questions or discussion with our presenter? If not, thank you so much for coming here today.

Thank you.

EMILY TODD: Thank you.

MILLIE CUNNINGHAM: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next to testify is Tamara Kramer for the Center for Children's Advocacy on Senate Bill 156.

Welcome Tamara.

TAMARA KRAMER: Thank you, that's a tough act for me to follow, so pardon my nerves.

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana and Representative Urban -- and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Tamara Kramer and -- I'm here today representing the Center for Children's Advocacy where I serve as a legal intern for the program that's run with the University of Connecticut School of Law.

I'm here today in strong support of Senate Bill 156, which is AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE DCF.

I wanted to start off by addressing a point that was raised by Senator Suzio to Jamey Bell. Unfortunately he's left but he had asked her why it was important for this to be done in statute as opposed to policy and I just wanted to -- I also highlighted this in my written testimony which should be before you. But there are several states, at least five, that are requiring this provision in their State Statutes and there are a number of other states who mandate frequent visitation, biweekly visitation or monthly visitation in their State

Statutes. And so I think this is a -- a trend where the research is catching up with the experience of the youth in care and I think it's an important step for Connecticut to join this movement towards codifying this really important measure.

So everyone in this room acknowledges the importance of sibling relationships, especially for those children who are in care. I've highlighted in my written testimony just one study, but there are numerous studies that demonstrate just how important relationships are to children who are bounced around the system. And how having just one relationship allows a child to move from a possible failure to a success story.

So what Senate Bill 156 would do, it would allow t=for the system's most vulnerable children to have an extra layer of protection. It would allow them to be provided stability and support. But requiring sibling visitation, at least once a week unless there is obviously some demonstrated need or there a reason why it wouldn't be appropriate. The state already has implemented policy that requires that sibling groups be placed together when at all possible and when it's in best interest -- or -- and the best interest of the children. So if these children that we're talking about with Senate Bill 156, these are the children that are already the most at risk. These are children who one of their siblings or they themselves are placed in congregate care facilities, you know, they may be in a therapeutic setting and their siblings placed somewhere else. These are children who tend to not have extended families who are supportive of their relationships, they tend to be children who are alone in the system, and unfortunately they tend to be the children who are aging out. And

what this Bill does is it provides an opportunity for those individuals to reconnect with their siblings, to have that relationship that might help them move forward.

The Center of *Youth's role in these type of conversations as a mechanism to provide a voice to the children in the system and it's wonderful that Voices for Children will have several children come here today and tell you their story so I won't spend too much time. But in my written testimony I've highlighted the story of two of our clients at the clinic and you can see from their story. One is 17, she's about to age out of the system and her and her brother are barely visiting one another because they've been placed in congregate care settings over a half-hour away from each other. And one of the children, the younger child has told one of our attorneys that while he's in his congregate care facility he feels like he has no family and, you know, he does have family. He has a sibling and what this Bill would allow and also perhaps *encourages Department of Children and Families to do is to place siblings closer together because when they have to provide transportation, you know, the incentive will be easier to keep families closer together. So I thank you for this opportunity and welcome any questions.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Tamara.

TAMARA KRAMER: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Any questions?

If not, thank you for your testimony.

TAMARA KRAMER: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Any questions? Comments?

Thank you very much, we appreciate it.

JESSICA FRIEDMAN: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next to testify is Ariana Alicea on Senate Bill 156. I'm sorry, is that Tiana?

ARIANA ALICEA: No, that's my sister. I'm going to be giving my testimony by reading her written if that's all right.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Oh, absolutely, well welcome. Just state your name for the record to make sure we have it right.

ARIANA ALICEA: My name is Ariana Alicea and I'll be reading Tiana Alicea's testimony. She's my 19-year-old sister, she couldn't be here today.

Tiana says I've never used foster care as an excuse for anything and I never plan to. That is not to say, however, that it has not made things harder for me. At the age of 12 I was separated from my sister, the only person who had remained consistent in my life. Though the circumstances were undesirable, my at the time social worker assured me that she would take me to visit my sister at least once a month.

I the year to follow I saw my sister about three times. I realized that my social worker was depriving me of visits essential to my relationship with my sister. Luckily, I was blessed to have a sister smart enough to make sure we remained in touch. Sorry.

At 14 years old she had proved herself to be more mature than my 40-something-year-old social worker. The thought that there are other kids out there who might be in the same situation truly breaks my heart. My sister is my best friend. Visits between siblings should not be a privilege. Sorry.

So I think my sister is absolutely correct and I think that siblings should have the right to see each other and that's why I was especially surprised when some people at DCF thought that this request was excessive. And just as other people have said, if we were asking to see out therapist once a week, nobody would find that to be too much of a challenge.

We all know that long-term and consistent relationships help with the outcomes of foster care -- foster care children aging out of the system and if you really want us to be independent and not have to fall back on government aid to be, you know, self-sufficient, then you really need to foster these bonds because they're very important to us. And that's what I have to say.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Ariana, you're a very, very good older sister.

ARIANA ALICEA: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: And we thank you so much for giving your testimony. Now you have to take note that the Commissioner has also heard from you and many, many others and she is, as we heard, and the Department is very willing to go along and enact this into statute. I believe that she not only supports this but believes it's a very important law to enact.

ARIANA ALICEA: I believe that.

SENATOR GERRATANA: So you've done your job in many, many, many different ways.

I don't have any other questions or comments but my cochair, Representative Urban does.

REP. URBAN: And I'm hoping that you'll see, and I don't think that in the 12 years that I've been at the General Assembly I've seen this, and that is that the Commissioner is still here and she is still listening. Yes, she is.

I -- I would just, first of all, it's a tremendous bond that you've developed with your sister and I have a sister and I know exactly what you two are talking about. Where were you at the time that your sister was in foster care? Were you also?

ARIANA ALICEA: I was also in foster care. We -- they couldn't find a placement for a 12-year-old and a 14-year-old so we were separated.

REP. URBAN: And you managed to make it work that you would still keep contact with your sister.

ARIANA ALICEA: I've always been pretty resourceful, so yes.

REP. URBAN: Good for you. Family is so important.

ARIANA ALICEA: It is.

REP. URBAN: So good for you and as I said, I'm going to repeat it again, the Commissioner is here, still listening, that's how important she believes it is.

ARIANA ALICEA: We appreciate that. Thank you for hearing me.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS: Thank you. It's not so much thanking for hearing you. I thank you for making the case, for justifying the policy. It is not a privilege, it is something we should do. And I'm so pleased to hear that you and your sister were able to -- to work your way through the system. But I can assure you that we are on a very, very different course right now and were it not for testimony like you, we might not. So I really thank you for taking the time and wish your sister well and -- and believe me, we are committed to this. Take care.

ARIANA ALICEA: Thank you. Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Representative.

Thank you very much for you testimony.

Next is, okay, Tianna Roy, sorry. Here comes Tianna.

Hi, Tianna.

TIANNA ROY: Hi. Hi, my name is Tianna Roy. I have been in care for the past four years and this Legislation is important to me for the following reasons.

SB156

The importance of seeing your siblings on a weekly basis allows you to have a sense of a family even though you're apart. It gives you hope and allows you to know that they're all right. It also gives you something to look forward to. And younger -- siblings, it gives them a sense of not being abandoned completely. It also allows the families to be closer during the transaction to the Department of Children and Families. If you ask me, passing this law would not -- not only meet the basic needs of

the children in care but also would benefit the Department with better-behaved children, less acting out and would have a calming effect. The homes -- environment would be easier on the foster parents.

I hope this passes to give all of us in care the efforts needed to be together during these difficult times. Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you very much. And we also appreciate that you have submitted written testimony also.

Are there any questions?

Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN: Tianna, are you in foster care at the moment?

TIANNA ROY: Yes, I am.

REP. URBAN: And your -- are you with your siblings or not with your siblings?

TIANNA ROY: I'm with my twin brother. My two younger siblings they were in care and my older sister, she was in care but she signed out when she was 18.

REP. URBAN: Do you get to see your siblings that you're not with on a regular basis?

TIANNA ROY: I see them every other Saturday.

REP. URBAN: Well, that's a start. So I -- I appreciate your coming in here and testifying. Your voice -- the voice of someone who is going through this is so incredibly strong and it makes -- it makes a very big difference to us so thank you for doing this.

TIANNA ROY: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you so much.

TIANNA ROY: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next is Shawn K.

Welcome, Shawn.

SHAWN K.: Hi, my name is Shawn. I am 17 years old and I live in Dayville, Connecticut and I'm for the Bill of 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES or the Select Committee of Children.

When I first heard about this Bill I thought where was this Bill when my brother Gary was not able to see me due to the fact he was adopted and the family he was with did not let him see or talk to me. I could not -- I could not know if he was doing well. As recently I have had contact with -- with him and I know he's doing fine. From what I heard, he was kicked out of the -- out of the home at the -- at his home -- out of the home he was -- sorry.

He was kicked out of his home at the age of 18 and he did not even graduate high school yet. He was out on his own with no education, no job, nothing. He managed to get back up on his feet and is now in the DMHAS program. He is in -- in an apartment and working at a casino as a janitor. That tragic event allowed us to see each other but I wish it was on better terms.

Well, I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't want to see another family torn apart due to something like this and I have to -- and

have to go through not knowing what is going on with their brother or sister whether it is bad or good. I know I wish I had know my brother was unhappy or and alone so that I could have given him some support even if it was just little. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Shawn, we appreciate your testimony. And we just had a quick question on the DMHAS program. Is that the supportive housing program?

SHAWN K.: Yes.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Yes. And that's, I think, through the Judicial Branch if memory serves working with Department of -- with DMHAS.

We appreciate this very much and I will also ask are there any other comments or questions?

If -- Representative Urban.

REP. URBAN: I would just again like to thank you for coming and making the effort and giving us this testimony. I know it's not an easy thing to do and we really appreciate it because, as I said before, it really makes a difference. So -- to hear your voice, it makes a difference. So thank you very much.

SHAWN K.: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: That's okay. Thank you, Shawn. Take care.

Next to give testimony is Liza Pickens.

Hi, Liza, welcome.

LIZA PICKENS: Hi. Hello, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Liza Pickens, I'm 20 years old and I

SB156

reside in Norwich, Connecticut. I come before you today as a adolescent client of the Department of Children and Families to help advocate and emphasize my support for Senate Bill 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Frequent and regular contact between siblings is essential to promoting the emotional well-being and -- long-term stability of young people of young people in DCF's care. For two years I lives in an all girls group home. I -- I've seen some of the girls encounter pain and being stressed out day to day because they have yet to see their brother or sister. I've seen girls run away and cut themselves with staff members saying everything will be okay. But will everything be okay? Seeing as the staff only works a none-hour shift and then they're back home with the ones they love unconditionally, the same unconditional love that all kids in Department of Children and Families need.

Key word, family. There is no therapy that can substitute family contact. I will not stand be -- I will not stand here before you today and act like I know your lifestyle and how you all grew up, but I have seen and heard and lived the dream that every child of DCF's system longs for and that is to either be with your family once again or see them as much as we can. I have been able to just ask, what's new for you this week?

This Senate Bill 156 will help improve emotional well-being by allowing you to see siblings as much as needed. Once a week visits are very important seeing as we don't spend a lifetime that we should with our biological siblings. What's -- what's supposed to be our

everlasting relationship is now a once-in-a-while get together. Personally I cannot stand here and say I did not see my siblings all the time with the Department of Children and Families' help and the case aides that brought me to spend as much time that I could with siblings. My youngest sister was placed in a - residential facility all the way in Florida near Daytona Beach. With that being said, my DCF worker herself was bringing me and two of my other siblings three times a year to go see her and we would spend the whole week out in Florida.

There were times that I called the residential facility and she was not able to speak with me and I would worry about her. When I saw her in Florida it assured me that she was really okay and I was able to focus on my own life and do what I needed to do. Just because visits are working out for me in the best way that they can does not mean that they are working out for all youth in care and I would like to have more frequent visits with my six sisters and four brothers. If I reached out to anyone today and helped prove a big point on behalf of this Senate Bill 156, ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT FAMILIES, I ask please to support the sibling rights for kids in DCF's care by voting yes on the Senate Bill.

Thank you for your time and listening. If there is any questions.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Liza. Thank you for your testimony. Quite a story. Actually Representative Urban has a question.

REP. URBAN: Now I'm just -- I'm very, I'm pleased that -- that you were able to have contact and

I would like you to know that these out-of-state placements, our Commissioner is working diligently on those to bring families back closer together. And we certainly appreciate your coming in and giving us your first-hand experience. So thank you very much for being here, Liza.

LIZA PICKENS: Thank you. She actually did come back. She not resides in New Britain, Connecticut at Klingberg Family Center because they said they were bringing kids back so --

REP. URBAN: Yea. Excellent.

LIZA PICKENS: -- that's a good thing.

REP. URBAN: Thank you that.

LIZA PICKENS: Thank you.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you. Thank you for being here.

LIZA PICKENS: Thanks.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next to testify is Carolyn Goodridge. Carolyn's from Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents.

CAROLYN GOODRIDGE: Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Carolyn Goodridge, I'm a social worker and public policy advocate for the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents. Our nonprofit agency supports, trains and advocates for foster, adoptive and relative caregiver parents in the state. There are approximately 3,000 foster families in the state.

HB5186

All right, thank you. How do you like being up here? Are you working with Representative Lyddy?

MATT COLE: Yes, it's a lot of fun.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Good. Yeah, wait in a month or so. Thank you so much. Take care.

Next is Victoria Sawyer.

VICTORIA SAWYER: Yes, good afternoon. My name is Victoria Sawyer and I have been in DCF's care for the last 15 years. I came into foster care when I was -- at the age of seven and I have five half -- five half-sisters, one biological sister and two brothers. And I was lucky enough to be placed with my sister, Jennifer, which, we've had our good times and our bad times but that's how siblings are which I -- I'm glad I had the opportunity to be able to have at least one of them in my life.

SB156

I would have liked to have more contact with my brothers but they -- at first they got placed in, like, group homes and then once they got out of the group home and went to an actual foster care fostered home, I had a visit with them maybe once sometimes twice a month. But as the Bill says, because I'm supporting the Bill on siblings. As the Bill says, I would have liked more because like throughout my years in foster care, I feel like I've kind of lost the connection I had with my brothers.

My older sister, my half-sister, I just got in contact with her again my senior year of high school so from age seven until the age of, I'd say about 18, I had no contact with her whatsoever. But it's because she was older, she didn't get taken away like the rest of us did. And like I -- I'm just getting to know

her again and I feel like I lost out on a lot of years of being -- having that relationship. And it -- it's difficult growing up knowing you have more, like, family but not having them in your life because you lose that valuable -- the valuable connection of just knowing you have family that loves and cares about you but you can't -- you can't do anything about it because you're a kid.

So me, I've been on the YAB, which is the Youth Advisory Board, every area office has one, for a couple years now and we've been discussing it and we -- we as youth feel that it's in our best interest to have as much contact with -- as much contact with our siblings as humanly possible because like a few of the other young people, folks said, it's -- it's something we need. Like we grew up with them throughout the years that we were with them and then just to stop having contact with them, it's -- it impacts us a lot. It makes the transition a whole lot harder not -- knowing that you're not going to have as much contact with them as you initially started with.

SENATOR GERRATANA: No, thank you, Victoria. Were you -- were you able to make phone calls or have any other kind of communication or?

VICTORIA SAWYER: When they were in the -- with my brothers, when they were in the group home, not, not so much, but once they left there we were able to -- I still keep in contact with my brothers and I'm turning 21. Not as much as I used to because of course they both work and like they have their own lives now because we're all adults. But once they got out of the group home we were able to make phone calls, but being able to talk on the phone and seeing them like fact to face isn't the same thing. Phone calls are great, they are, but it's

nothing like that bond you have when you're together.

SENATOR GERRATANA: I would agree.

Any questions or concerns?

Okay. Well, thank you so much for coming up here today, Victoria, and giving your testimony.

VICTORIA SAWYER: You're welcome.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next is Karen Coton, Coton, sorry.

Hi, Karen.

KAREN COTON: Hi. It's Coton.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Coton.

KAREN COTON: Everybody says cotton.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Okay. Thank you.

KAREN COTON: We're used to it.

SENATOR GERRATANA: That's why we have everyone identify themselves so somebody gets it straight. Thank you.

KAREN COTON: Yes. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair Urban and Madam Chair Gerratana and members of the Select Committee on Children. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Karen Coton, I'm an adoptive parent and foster -- former foster parent from Waterbury. I'm here today to ask you for your support for the foster parent bill of rights, H.B. 5186.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Next is Jeremiah Romero.
There's Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: Hello, my name is Jeremiah Romero.
I want to be speaking on the Bill S.B. 156 on
the topic of siblings.

I'm going to tell you probably my personal
story because that's the best way that I know
of and what I've seen and hear and things that
I've dealt with.

Growing up I've been in a very abusive home
and, you know, I've always been the caregiver
of my brothers and my sisters and I've been the
one that they look to for support. So moving
into foster care and being separated from them
because they couldn't find a placement for
three kids of different ages, it's hard because
you're losing that personal connection that you
built and something that they need to grow up
with. So growing up, I've never really had,
you know, that connection with them because
they've all been separated.

One of my brothers is in Rhode Island in a
foster home, my sister's in Florida, my other
brother's in Stafford so I really don't get to
see them being in Bristol. As of now, I'm 19
and I finally have -- I'm able to see them and
looking back over the years and seeing my
sister going to hospitals because of what she's
been through and asking them to be able to see
her brother, not being able to see me, it's --
it kind of angers you a little bit and it makes
me want to fight for this a lot more for the
kids who are coming up who need this, the kids
who have been through probably worse than what
I've been through and do need that personal
connection that's there.

Also on -- on this Bill, it states that it should be at least once a week and I think that even more so because you're used to seeing your brothers and sister every day, every night, and you're used to seeing and having that connection with them and even twice a week, three times a week, that -- that connection that'll -- that'll keep, that lasts a lifetime basically. And I think that's what we need. And, you know, just to also go on with this Bill, to add things into it that would take a - - not take away but add more, you know, time because even if you go for an hour, that's not a lot of time to see your brother and sister and tell them, hey, I do love you and I'm here for you, if you need me, you know, I'm here. And also build connections with the Internet we use. We have Facebook, we have so many different things that we can use to our ability to help children and if you could integrate that, that would benefit me. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Thank you, Jeremiah. Thank you for giving your testimony today, coming up here. Representative Urban has something to say.

REP. URBAN: You -- you're now 19 and you have one sibling in Rhode Island.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: I have one sibling in Rhode Island.

REP. URBAN: And how old is that sibling?

JEREMIAH ROMERO: He is at this moment he just turned five. I haven't seen him -- I've only seen him once.

REP. URBAN: Oh, gosh. And is he right across the border? Is he --

JEREMIAH ROMERO: Yes.

REP. URBAN: Okay, so he's right across the border.
Then you have another sibling still in Florida?

JEREMIAH ROMERO: Yes, she's still in Florida and
she still has trouble because she's not able to
see the rest of her family.

REP. URBAN: How old is she?

JEREMIAH ROMERO: She just turned 15.

REP. URBAN: Okay, so these the ones that -- we know
that our Commissioner is trying very hard to
bring children back to Connecticut.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: She's been adopted so it's --

REP. URBAN: Oh, so she's adopted now, so, okay.
Well good and bad.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: Yes.

REP. URBAN: Thank you so very much for coming up.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: Thank you so much.

REP. URBAN: Your voice is so important, thank you.

JEREMIAH ROMERO: You're welcome.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Okay. Next person is Sheila
Matthews from Able Child, I think.

SHEILA MATTHEWS: Hi.

SENATOR GERRATANA: Hi, Sheila.

SHEILA MATTHEWS: Hi, I'm Sheila Matthews, I'm with
a national parent organization called Able

HB 5217
HB 5185
HB 5186

Testimony of Alixes Rosado in Support of S.B. 156

Good afternoon,

My name is Alixes Rosado. I am 23 Years old and I have grown up in the CT foster care system. Today I would like to share my message with you in hopes that it will open your minds, as well as your hearts for the youth currently in care. I do regret not being able to attend in person, for this is a cause that I am extremely passionate about. It is an issue that I have worked very diligently on for years, and I am excited to be able to see this come to life. I am hopeful that this bill S.B. 156 will be the first of many steps to create a much needed change within our child welfare system.

23 years ago today, I was born. I was one of what would soon be 4 children. At around the age of 6 I was taken into care for the first time. It was scary. I was young, innocent, and confused. What would happen? Where was I going? Will I see my brothers and sisters? These questions weighed heavily on my mind. Over the years, as we bounced around from foster home to foster home, and through a great amount of groups homes, residential facilities and youth shelters, I lost my hope of ever having a "real" relationship" with my 3 siblings. DCF did their part in making sure that we had monthly (or at least bi-monthly) visits, however it simply was not enough to BUILD or MAINTAIN a solid relationship. Although we are older now, and have the ability to make contact with each other on our own, it is very rare that we do. This is simply because of the strain that has been placed on our relationship through the course of over 10 years. Why does a system geared towards "keeping families together" do this to our groups of siblings? It doesn't makes sense.

As I stated, I am 23 years old today. My time as a foster youth has just about expired. I understand that this means a bill like this will not help me in any way, however I do take Solace in the fact that should it pass, it will be instrumental in the lives of the thousands of foster youth still in our system. Thousands of youth who yearn to be able to grow up with their brothers and sisters. Thousands of youth, who just want to be "normal"

I am extremely proud of the work that the New England Youth Coalition has done to get conversations about siblings started, CT Voices for taking the issue to heart and pushing for it with best intentions, all the Youth advisory boards across the state who come together to fight for these types of changes, and of course Commissioner Katz. Although this role may still be quite new for you I applaud all of the work you do, and can not thank you enough for TRULY listening to the voice of our youth. I thank the congress for allowing my words to be heard today and urge you to strongly consider the passage of this bill. It will change lives.

Thank You

Testimony of Sixto Cancel in Support of S.B. 156
An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner
of Children and Families.

Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2012

My phone kept vibrating. I looked at my phone, it was my mother. I pressed the red end call button. I got up but she kept calling and calling. I ended her call about four times and on the fifth I answer it whispering into the phone that I was in church. She responded to me by saying, "They killed Tyson."

No cushion and especially no comfort. I collapsed into the seat in disbelief. A scream from the deepest spot in my diaphragm echoed through the church. I had lost it. I yelled and scream not knowing what to do. My hands trembled as much as my voice. My friends try to ask me what was wrong but I could not complete the sentences without choking or gasping for air.

He was just here, I thought. This must be a lie. How could God allow this? Why would he permit such a thing? I had never been angry with God until this day. I stormed out the church. Everything in my life was always screwed up. What did I do to deserve this? Who the hell was God to take my brother?

My greatest regret in my life is that I never told my nineteen year old brother how much I love him or had the opportunity to spend as much time as I wanted with him. My older brother didn't grow up in the same state as me and because of it I didn't get to see him as often. There was always "red tape." However, living in the same city as my other siblings and not being able to see them is worst. There was always this unsaid sense that you can connect with your siblings when get older but what happens when you missed the opportunity because one sibling died or like my other three brothers, incarcerated? Sometimes there is no later. We need our siblings now. I always said that it is not the Department of Children and Families fault that I entered foster care but it is their fault that I wasn't able to spend time with my siblings.

Testimony of Ivory, age 17, Stratford
In Support of S.B. 156

My name is Ivory. I am 17 years old and live in Stratford. I support Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families. It's good for kids to be in touch with their siblings. When a child doesn't have their parents, then the next closest family relationship they can have is with their biological siblings. I have been in DCF for several years and have been seeing my biological siblings once a week and I feel that they should be able to visit with their siblings once a week or more often. Visiting them often has helped me stay in touch with my family. The more time you spend with your family, the closer your relationships are and the more likely you are to stay connected. I ask you to support sibling rights for kids in DCF care by voting yes on Senate Bill 156. Thank you very much for your time and support.

Testimony of Jaquan, age 15, Bridgeport
In Support of S.B. 156

My name is Jaquan. I am 15 years old and live in Bridgeport. I support Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families. I have been in DCF for many years and have been seeing my biological siblings once every other week in New Haven. I feel that children in DCF should be able to see their family as often as possible because DCF shouldn't have the authority to tear brothers and sisters apart. I would like to see my siblings more often, like once a week. I ask you to support sibling rights for kids in DCF care by voting yes on Senate Bill 156. Thank you very much for your time and support.

Youth Advisory Board.
Andrea Rhodes
17 Years old
Bridgeport, CT

I am for and support Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families. I am for this bill because there are a lot of children in foster who don't know half of their siblings. I think it's important to have more visits because children in care shouldn't have to feel that they're alone or don't have no family. Being in DCF and dealing with different obstacles are hard enough and when we have someone to turn to such as a sister and/or brother who we can connect with when no one else is there, it's always a good feeling. It shows that you're not alone and anything is possible. I ask you to support sibling rights for kids in DCF care by voting yes on Senate Bill 156 and thank you for taking my vote/ opinion into consideration.

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

February Session, 2012

Raised Bill No. 156**An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the****Commissioner of Children and Families**

Referred to Select Committee on Children

REMARKS OF ATTY. MICHAEL H. AGRANOFF

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I have been a DCF defense lawyer since 1991. At present, ours is the only law firm in the State of Connecticut providing full-service DCF defense to private-paying adults on a full-time basis.

The present bill seeks to ensure that meaningful visitation occurs for siblings who have been removed from their families. Our office applauds this bill, and notes that the visitation specified often already occurs in practice.

The bill does not specifically state that the Commissioner's decision denying such visitation could be the subject of an administrative appeal. However, by requiring denial information in treatment plan, the mechanism would exist for visitation appeal motions to be filed in the Juvenile Court.

The bond between siblings is often a casualty of the child removal process. DCF is to be commended for proposing this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

MICHAEL H. AGRANOFF

Attorney At Law

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The Select Committee on Children
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Re: **RAISED BILL NO. 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Dear the Select Committee on Children,

The following testimony is submitted in support of Raised Bill No. 156. Raised Bill No. 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families, would ensure that children and youth committed to the custody of the Commissioner visit with their siblings on a minimum basis in order to sustain the bonds between siblings.

What would this bill accomplish?

Under current law, the Commissioner *shall* ensure that a foster child has access to and visitation rights with his or her siblings. **There is no set benchmark as to the frequency or duration of sibling visits**. Unfortunately for the child, the burden is upon the child or child's attorney to argue for increased access and visitation with siblings. Frequently, any request for more consistent or frequent visitation is met with refusal. The Commissioner cites, as justification, a "lack of case aids," or "lack of resources". As attorneys representing children, Oakley & Chizinski, LLC has even been told by the Department of Children and Families that committed children "are lucky to get monthly visits."

- o Raised Bill No. 156 establishes a requirement that visits occur on a weekly basis, unless the Commissioner finds that the frequency of such visitation is not in the best interests of each sibling
- o Raised Bill No. 156 shifts the legal burden of proof to the Commissioner, who would be responsible for demonstrating that weekly sibling visits are not in the best interests of the child before visits could be withheld.
- o Raised Bill No. 156 clarifies that the sole factor to be considered in determining the frequency of sibling visitation is the best interest of the child, rather than financial expense or convenience.

Why is this bill important?

Despite current law requiring the provision of sibling visits to foster children, **such visits are often infrequent in number, irregular in timing, and provided solely at the whim of the Commissioner**. Research has shown that the single most important factor in getting children back with their biological families is regular and frequent visits.¹ A benchmark requirement must be established in order to protect the beneficial effects of sibling visitation for foster children.

- o When children are not placed together, visits can help maintain the attachment to family and lessen the trauma of being placed apart.²
- o When visits are regular and frequent, and allow opportunity to connect in a meaningful way, they have many of the same benefits of sibling placement together: less trauma and loss, feeling of belonging, shared history, and opportunity to work through problems.³

¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services, White Paper on Sibling Placement and Visits, 16 (2007), available at <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/Sibling%20White%20Paper%20wES.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 15

³ *Id.* at 16.

Public Hearing on Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning Siblings Visitation for Children in Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families before the Select Committee on Children of the Connecticut General Assembly

Hello ladies and gentleman,

My name is Liza Pickens I'm 20 years old and reside in Norwich CT; I come before you today as an adolescent client of the Department of Children and Families to help advocate and emphasize my support for Senate Bill 156, An act concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families".

Frequent and regular contact between siblings is essential to promoting the emotional well-being and long-term stability of young people in (DCF) care. "For two years I lived in an all-girls group home , I've seen some of the girls encounter pain and being stressed out day to day because they have yet to see there brothers or sisters. I've seen girls run away and cut themselves with staff members saying everything will be okay! But will everything be okay? Seeing as the staff only work a 9 hour shift and then there back home with the ones they love unconditionally, the same unconditional love that all kids in the Department of Children and Families need. Key word "Family". There is no therapy that can substitute for family contact.

I will not stand here before you today and act like I know your lifestyle and how you all grew up, but I have seen and heard and lived the dream that every child in the (DCF) system longs for, and that is to either be with our family once again or see them as much as we can. I have been able to just ask "what's new for you this week"? This Senate Bill 156 will help improve emotional well-being by allowing youth to see siblings as much as needed! Once a week visits are very important seeing as we don't spend the lifetime that we should with our biological siblings. What's supposed to be our "everlasting relationship" is now a once in while get together"?

"Personally I cannot stand here and say I didn't see my siblings all the time with the help of Department of Children and Families (DCF). The case aids (CA) brought me to spend as much time that I could with my siblings. My youngest sister was placed in a Residential all the way in Florida near Daytona Beach, with that being said my (DCF) worker herself was bringing me and two of my other siblings three times a year to go see her and we would

spend a whole week out in Florida. There were times that I called the residential facility and she was not able to speak with me and I would worry about her. When I saw her in Florida it assured me that she was really okay and I was able to focus on my own life and do what I needed to do. Just because visits are working out for me in the best way that they can does not mean that they are working out for all youth in care and I would like to have more frequent visits with my six sisters and four brothers. If I reached out to anyone today and helped prove a big point on behalf of the Senate Bill 156, Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families "I ask you please to support the sibling rights for kids in (DCF) care by voting yes on Senate Bill 156."

"I thank you for your time and listening to me speak and I welcome any questions you have for me"

Shawn K
Testimony re Senate Bill 156

Hi,

My name is Shawn K. I am 17 years old and live in Dayville CT and I am for the bill; 156, Act concerning sibling visitation for children in care and custody of the Commissioner of The Department of Children and Families before the select committee on children.

When I first heard about this bill I thought, where was this when my brother Gary was not able to see me due to the fact that he was adopted and the family he was with did not let him see or talk to me. I could not know if he was doing well.

As of recently I have had contact with him and I know he is doing fine. From what I heard he was kicked out of his home at the age of 18 and he did not even get to graduate high school yet. He was out on his own with no education, no job, nothing. He managed to get up on his feet and is now in a DMHAS program. He is in an apartment and he is working at a casino as a janitor. That tragic even allowed us to see each other again but I wish it was on better terms.

Well I guess what I am trying to say is that I don't want to see another family torn apart due to something like this and have to go through not knowing what is going on with their brother or sister whether it is bad or good. I know I wish I had known that my brother was unhappy and alone so that I could have given him some support even if it was just a little.

Thank you for your time.

S.B 156 Pro

Hi my name is Tianna Roy. I have been in care for the past four years and this legislature is important to me for the following reasons: The importance of seeing you're siblings on a weekly basis allows you to have sense of a family even though you're apart. It gives you hope and allows you to know that they are alright. It also gives you something to look forward to. In younger siblings, it gives them a sense of not being abandoned completely. It also allows the families to be closer during the transition to the Department Of Children and Families.

If you ask me, passing this bill would not only meet the basic needs of the children in care but also it would benefit the department with better behaved children, less acting out and would have a calming effect. The home's environment would be easier on the foster parents. I hope this passes to give all of us in care the opportunity to be together during these difficult times. Thank you

Testimony of Tiana Alicea

In Support of S.B. 156

I have never used foster care as an excuse for anything and I never plan to. That is not to say, however, that it has not made things harder for me. At the age of twelve I was separated from my sister, the only person who had remained consistent in my life. Though the circumstances were undesirable my at the time social worker assured me she would take me to visit my sister at least once a month. In the year to follow I saw my sister around three times. I realized that my social worker was depriving me of visits essential to my relationship with my sister. Luckily I was blessed to have a sister smart enough to make sure we remained in touch. At fourteen years old she had proved herself to be more mature than my forty something year old social worker. The thought that there are other kids out there who might be in this same situation truly breaks my heart. My sister is my best friend. Visits between siblings should not be a privilege.

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

**TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY
IN SUPPORT OF SB-156 AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION
FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF
THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University of Connecticut School Of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

We strongly support Raised Bill 156 which will require the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to facilitate at least weekly visitation between siblings who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and who are placed separately by DCF. The legislation also directs the Department to meet with youth serving on the Department's Youth Advisory Boards to gather recommendations for a "Sibling Bill of Rights". This bill of rights would be incorporated into Department policy, shared with all children and youth in care, and submitted to the Select Committee on Children for consideration of possible further legislative action.

MICHAEL AND ANDREA: "I feel like I have no family."

At the Center for Children's Advocacy we represent children of all ages who have suffered the dual traumas of abuse or neglect and removal from their families. Sometimes these children are even separated from their brothers and sisters, and they live without the comfort and familiarity that their siblings provide. We know these children, see their faces and hear their stories. We know the anguish and desolation they feel when they don't live with their families, when they feel alone and maybe even forgotten. Two of the Center's clients are Michael and Andrea. Michael is twelve years old and Andrea is seventeen. Michael and Andrea were removed from their home because of their mother's struggles with mental illness and her inability to meet their daily needs and keep them safe. But Michael and Andrea were not placed together. They were placed in two different group facilities located a half hour apart. Both of the children repeatedly ask to see each other and have requested regular visits where they can "be normal" and just "hang out together." Michael told his lawyer that in his group home, he "feels like [he] has no family." So far, Michael and Andrea have only been able to see each other once per month.



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The Research Shows -- Sibling Relationships are Critical for Abused and Neglected Children

A report published by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative finds that sibling relationships are critically important for youth.¹ Many teenagers in DCF care for example,

¹ JIM CASEY YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE, SOCIAL CAPITAL. BUILDING QUALITY NETWORKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE, ISSUE BRIEF #2, available at <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/new-issue-brief-social-capital-0>.

have experienced great loss, deprivation, and abandonment in their lives. Many children, particularly older children who have grown up in DCF care, do not have a consistent caregiver or even a mentor to provide them with permanence, guidance and stability. Too many of these children do not have someone to say, "Michael, you are the most important person in the world to me."

For these reasons child welfare experts strongly recommend that those working with teens in foster care support sibling relationships.² Experts recognize that sibling relationships may well be the most important and intimate relationships that a young person can have.³

The Law Protects the Rights of Siblings

The Department has acknowledged the importance of the sibling relationship, with former Commissioner Susan Hamilton saying that, "...keeping brothers and sisters together...provid[es] immeasurable benefits to the children."⁴ State,⁵ as well as federal,⁶ law require siblings be placed together whenever possible. The Department's ability to maintain sibling groups is also one of the requirements being tracked by the court monitor in the *Juan F. Exit Plan*.⁷ This requirement, that 95% of sibling groups are placed together in DCF care, is one of only six that the Department was unable to meet in the January 2012 report from the court monitor.⁸ The Department has failed to meet this measure consistently over the past twenty-one quarters.⁹

It is important that while the Department continues to strive for placements that allow siblings to stay together that the agency also takes steps to preserve sibling relationships where children are split apart. SB 156 codifies what experts in the field agree to be good policy, frequent visitation for siblings who have been placed in separate homes.

Connecticut Should Join Those States That Already Guarantee Frequent Visitation for Siblings

Nationwide, child welfare agencies legislatures have recognized the importance of sibling visitation and have taken measures to promote the maintenance of family relationship. In New York state, agencies are required to make diligent efforts to facilitate bi-weekly face-to-face visitation between siblings.¹⁰ Missouri and Utah have requirement for weekly visits.¹¹ Nebraska has codified the important

² CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY, SIBLING ISSUES IN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION (December 2006), available at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Lisa Flower, *Connecting Brothers and Sisters*, DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (Jan. 29, 2009), <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=3622&Q=432384>

⁵ CONN. AGENCIES. REGS. § 17a-101-13(c)(4) (2011) ("Make every attempt to place siblings together and maintain family ties.").

⁶ 42 U.S.C. § 471(31)(a) (2006) ("to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, kinship guardianship, or adoptive placement, unless the State documents that such a joint placement would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.").

⁷ *Juan F. v. Malloy Exit Plan Quarterly Report: July 1, 2011 - September 30, 2011, Civil Action No. 2:89 CV 859 (CFD)*, 8 (January 2012), available at http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/publications/pdf/3rd_qtr_2011_report_final.pdf.

⁸ *Id.* at 4.

⁹ *Id.* at 10.

¹⁰ CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY at 10.

¹¹ *Id.*

requirement that frequent visitation be pursued by the child welfare agency.¹² Connecticut should join these states by providing sibling groups in the Department's care the opportunities they need to foster and maintain these important relationships.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah Healy Eagan, J.D.
Director of the Child Abuse Project
Center for Children's Advocacy
University of Connecticut School of Law



Tamara Kramer
Law Student Intern
Center for Children's Advocacy
University of Connecticut School of Law

¹² *Id.*

**Testimony Supporting: S.B. 156: An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation
for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families**

Joan Kaufman, Ph.D.

Yale University School of Medicine

Select Committee on Children

February 28, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban, and distinguished of the Select Committee on Children:

Among children in care, separation from siblings is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and anger symptoms.¹ It is also associated with greater likelihood of placement and adoption disruption.² Maintaining connections with siblings and other family members can be a crucial resource for older children as they transition to independence,³ and it is an important factor in promoting resilience in maltreated children.⁴

The Juan F. Exit Plan requires that "at least 95% of the siblings entering out-of-home placement shall be placed together unless there are documented therapeutic reasons for separate placements." This is a standard that has consistently not been met, with approximately 15% of the children entering out-of-home care separated from siblings at time of initial placement. In our prior longitudinal studies of children in DCF care, we found the proportion of children separated from siblings increased significantly with subsequent placements and longer time in care.

DCF does not systematically track information about sibling visitation. A small case review conducted during the last federal Children & Family Service Review revealed that, while one-third of the cases reviewed had sibling visitation at least weekly, the majority had visitation less than twice a month, and one-third had no visitation with their siblings at all during the time period under review.

Given the importance of sibling relationships for the well being of children in care, I lend my support for S.B. 156. Improved data management is required to know the proportion of all children in care living with or separated from siblings, and the frequency of contact among siblings that are separated. The proposed standard of weekly visitation, with allowable modifications under extenuating circumstances, is reasonable and in the best interest of the child.

References

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- 3 Massinga R, Pecora PJ Providing better opportunities for older children in the child welfare system. *Future Child* Winter 2004,14(1) 150-173
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CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Independent research and advocacy to improve the lives of Connecticut's children

Testimony Supporting
S.B. 156: An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the
Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families
and H.B. 5186: An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights

Jamey Bell, J.D., Alexandra Dufresne, J.D., and Jake Siegel
Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban, and Distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports S.B. 156: An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families.

1. *When it is not possible to place sibling groups together, DCF should provide for frequent and regular visitation between separated siblings.*

When children are removed from their families due to parental abuse or neglect, they should be placed together with their siblings unless such placement is not in their best interest. Current law requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to place sibling groups together "if possible."¹ However, DCF has consistently failed to meet its obligation under the *Juan F.* settlement to place 95% of siblings together (excluding cases where such placement is not in the children's best interest).² The most recent federal Child and Family Service Review (April 2009) also found DCF in need of improvement in order to meet the federal standard for sibling placement.³

In cases where sibling groups must be separated, brothers and sisters should have the right to consistent visitation. For children in foster care, as for all children, relationships with brothers and sisters are some of the most important and longest-lasting relationships in their lives, so it is essential for the Department to support the continuation of these ties. As "James," a 16-year-old in DCF care, explained during Foster Youth Capitol Day in October 2011:

"If you're put into care, you definitely need to have somebody by your side. Let me tell you, my little brother is ten, and I could not imagine what it would be like not being able to see him at all, especially with the circumstances me and him have grown up in."

S.B. 156 would enable siblings separated by DCF to visit one another a minimum of once per week (on average), unless such frequent visitation is not in the best interest of each sibling.

Under DCF's current policy, there is no consistent standard for visitation between siblings who have been separated from their families due to parental abuse or neglect. Many young people in DCF care

report visitation only once a month, or, in some cases, even less frequently. The case review conducted during the 2009 Children and Family Service Review revealed that, while one-third of the cases reviewed had sibling visitation at least weekly, the majority had visitation less than twice a month, and one-third had no visitation with their siblings at all during the time period under review. In summary, the federal reviewer concluded that, in a majority of applicable cases, DCF “**did not make concerted efforts to promote visitation with siblings.**”⁴

2. *Increasing sibling visitation is consistent with best practices in child welfare and with the direction of the Department.*

A once-a-week baseline is consistent with best practices in child welfare, which aim to recreate a sense of normalcy by requiring **frequent** and **regular** contact between siblings.

The uncertainty of being separated from siblings with infrequent or irregular visitation can compound the trauma of separation from parents. In fact, the original complaint in the *Juan F.* litigation included the claim that separation from and lack of visitation with siblings had compounded the trauma of Juan’s removal from his home:

“DYCS (the predecessor agency of DCF) has not told Juan where it has placed his younger sister and has arranged no visits between them. DCYS also has failed to make adequate efforts to facilitate visits between Juan and his younger brother, who is also in DCYS custody, leaving Juan intensely fearful that he will lose all contact with his brother, just as he has lost contact with all of his other family members.”⁵

Currently, DCF is introducing practice changes that have the potential to transform the agency’s operation and improve the services provided to children and families.⁶ We believe that these practice changes will allow DCF to place more sibling groups together,⁷ and to place children in closer proximity to their siblings in the cases where they must be separated. Therefore, achieving once-a-week sibling visitation by October 1, 2014 is a reasonable expectation for the Department.

3. *S.B. 156 would allow the Department to waive the once-a-week minimum baseline in any case in which such frequent visitation is not in each sibling’s best interest.*

Current law requires DCF to ensure that sibling visitation occurs throughout the duration of placement, with the frequency and duration determined by the best interest of the children.⁸ However, as discussed above, in a substantial number of cases visitation occurs only once-a-month, or less frequently, because of resource constraints or other considerations. This bill attempts to shift the baseline expectation to once-a-week visitation, but preserves the ability of the Department to determine that such frequency is not in each child’s best interest.

Should DCF determine that once-a-week visitation is not in each sibling’s best interest, the Department will be required to document the reasons for the finding in each child’s treatment plan. This requirement parallels the current standard, which requires DCF to provide such justification in cases where it recommends no visitation or less visitation than requested by a child’s attorney or guardian ad litem.⁹

4. *The bill directs DCF to meet with members of the DCF Youth Advisory Boards to gather additional suggestions for strengthening sibling rights.*

Year after year, improving sibling visitation rights and strengthening sibling bonds are top priorities for reform raised by children and youth who grow up in Connecticut's child welfare system. The requests that young people raise in our conversations are largely ones that most of us would take for granted, such as the right to celebrate birthdays and significant holidays with siblings, the right to be notified of changes in a sibling's placement, and the right not to have contact with siblings withdrawn as a punishment.

S.B. 156 directs DCF to meet with representatives from DCF's Youth Advisory Boards (YABs)¹⁰ to speak about these priorities and gather recommendations for a "Sibling Bill of Rights." The Sibling Bill of Rights would be incorporated into Department policy, shared with all children and youth in DCF's care, and submitted to the Select Committee on Children for consideration of possible further legislative action.

By meeting with youth representatives to draft a Sibling Bill of Rights, DCF would tap into the experience of young people with first-hand knowledge of Connecticut's child welfare system. Jointly, DCF and the YABs would be tasked with developing practical solutions for how best to protect the sibling relationships critical to children's well-being. By incorporating these suggestions into policy, DCF would signal its seriousness about taking into account the voices of young people in care and would make DCF's expectations for promoting sibling relationships part of the official public policy of the Department. We believe that the process of developing a Sibling Bill of Rights in consultation with the Youth Advisory Boards would not only lead to better outcomes for sibling groups in care, but would also help support continued youth engagement within the Department.

Connecticut Voices for Children also supports H.B. 5186, An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

We are pleased with the great strides the Department has made in the past year in terms of recognizing the importance of retaining current foster parent and in committing to improving the foster parent experience.¹¹ We believe that enacting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights would support the Department's goals for improving the foster care system.

According to the 2010 CAFAP satisfaction survey addendum, 42% of foster families reported that they were recruited by a friend, "through a relative," or by other foster families.¹² Therefore, improving current foster family perceptions is a key not only to increasing foster family retention, but also to boosting recruitment of new foster families.

Most of the concepts contained in this bill—treating foster parents with respect, involving them in case-planning to the extent practical, sharing information regarding the children in their care to the extent allowed by law and providing appropriate training, not retaliating against foster parents—are not controversial. Furthermore, most, if not all fall within current department policy, if not always practice. However, we believe that this legislation is a positive addition because it collects all of these "rights" in one location and requires DCF to distribute copies, ensuring that foster parents are more informed about policies affecting them. Even more importantly, it indicates to foster parents that we as a state recognize their contributions as valued members of the treatment team.

Connecticut Voices for Children therefore urges you to support both S.B. 156 and H.B. 5186. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on these bills.

¹ Connecticut General Statutes §46b-129(j)

² Outcome Measure 10 of the *Juan F.* Exit Plan requires that “at least 95% of the siblings entering out-of-home placement shall be placed together unless there are documented therapeutic reasons for separate placements.” DCF’s sibling placement in the last four quarters was as follows (see p. 10 of the 3rd Quarter 2011 Report):

OM 10: Percent of Siblings Placed Together (excluding documented therapeutic reasons for separate placements)

4Q 2010	1Q 2011	2Q 2011	3Q 2011
83.3%	86.7%	85.8%	89.3%

³ United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Administration on Children and Families. Children’s Bureau. Final Report. Connecticut Child and Family Services Review, April 2009.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Juan F. v O’Neill*, Complaint p.18-19.

⁶ Among the practice changes are the utilization of “family-based regional and community services as the presumptive service delivery context, decreasing the use of congregate care settings overall, especially for young children, and the systematic return of youngsters in out-of-state placement settings, [and] expanding the use of family foster care, especially relative care.” See DCF Continuum of Care Partnership: Co-Chairpersons’ Report to the Commissioner. January 12, 2012 (revised 01/19/12). Available at:

http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/continuumofcare/pdf/dcf_continuum_of_care_partnership_co-chairpersons_update_1_19_12.pdf

⁷ According to data provided by DCF, as of 2/1/2012 there were 673 kids in DCF care not placed with all of their siblings, compromising 237 sibling groups, 100 of which consisted of three or more siblings.

⁸ Connecticut General Statutes §17a-10a(c). “If such child has an existing relationship with a sibling and is separated from such sibling as a result of intervention by the commissioner including, but not limited to, placement in a foster home or in the home of a relative, the commissioner shall, based upon consideration of the best interests of the child, ensure that such child has access to and visitation rights with such sibling throughout the duration of such placement. In determining the number, frequency and duration of such visits, the commissioner shall consider the best interests of each sibling, given each child’s age and developmental level and the continuation of the sibling relationship.”

⁹ Connecticut General Statutes §17a-10a(d). “The commissioner shall include in each child’s plan of treatment information relating to the factors considered in making visitation determinations pursuant to this section. If the commissioner determines that such visits are not in the best interests of the child, or that the number, frequency or duration of the visits requested by the child’s attorney or guardian ad litem is not in the best interests of the child, the commissioner shall include the reasons for such determination in the child’s plan of treatment.”

¹⁰ The Youth Advisory Boards are groups of youth in care that meet at the area office level to advise the Department on policy and practice. See DCF Policy Manual §42-20-15.

¹¹ For more information about the Department’s commitment to overhauling the family foster care system, see Connecticut Department of Children and Families. “We All Need Somebody: Supporting Children, Families and the Workforce in Connecticut’s Family Foster Care System.” *Fostering the Future*. September 30, 2011. Available at: http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/publications/pdf/final_family_foster_report_9_30_11.pdf

¹² Jake Siegel. “Increasing Retention of Connecticut’s Foster Families.” Connecticut Voices for Children. May 2011. Available at: <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/cw11increasingretention.pdf>.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony
Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2012



S.B. No. 192 AN ACT CONCERNING FINALIZING ADOPTIONS BY THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR JUVENILE MATTERS

The Department of Children and Families supports S. B. No. 192 - An Act Concerning Finalizing Adoptions by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. This proposal is part of DCF's legislative package this year, and we thank the Committee for raising the bill.

This bill would permit the finalization of adoptions in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters for those cases under the jurisdiction of the Court for purposes of a termination of parental rights (TPR) petition. The Superior Court for Juvenile Matters has detailed knowledge of the case including the child's best interest and the care the child received by the proposed adoptive parents. Approximately 1,000 adoptions are finalized each year by Probate Courts and this legislation would impact 500 to 600 adoptions. The non-DCF adoptions finalized by Probate Courts are typically step-parent adoptions and adoptions facilitated by private child-placing agencies.

The data below from FY 2011 shows that it takes just under one year (11.6 months) on average from termination of parental rights to adoption finalization. The median length of time is 6.9 months. We believe that this bill can decrease this length of time between termination of parental rights and adoption and permit permanency for the child and the adoptive family.

DCF Office	FY 2011 Adoptions	Time from TPR to Adoption	
		Average	Median
Bridgeport	25	7.8 months	6.1 months
Danbury	17	9.7 months	4.8 months
Hartford	75	10.3 months	6.8 months
Manchester	62	9.1 months	6.7 months
Menden	23	15.7 months	4.5 months
Middletown	9	12.4 months	4.8 months
Milford	17	17.6 months	7.5 months
New Britain	59	12.7 months	7.4 months
New Haven	48	13.5 months	10.6 months
Norwalk	8	14.9 months	4.9 months
Norwich	63	8.5 months	4.6 months
Stamford	6	15.9 months	9.8 months
Torrington	28	8.8 months	5.2 months
Waterbury	56	16.4 months	10.2 months
Willimantic	23	9.9 months	5.7 months
Statewide	519	11.6 months	6.9 months

HB5185

HB5217

SB156

SB157

SB193

HB5186

S.B. No. 156 AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Department of Children and Families supports S.B. No. 156 - An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families.

We concur with the important objective of this bill to ensure consistent and meaningful visitation of siblings in the care of DCF when they are not placed together. The Department has worked with Connecticut Voices for Children in the development of this proposal, and we appreciate the willingness of the proponents to defer the effective date in order to allow us sufficient time to modify our sibling visitation practice and policies.

Current DCF policy¹ specifies that the Department shall ensure that:

- visits occur as frequently as reasonably possible based upon the consideration of the best interests of the child, including age and developmental level of the child;
- visits be of sufficient number and duration to ensure continuation of the relationship between the child, parents, and siblings; and
- siblings with an existing relationship who are separated due to the Department's intervention be provided with ongoing visitation throughout the length of the separation taking into account the best interests of each sibling, their ages and developmental levels, and the continuation of the sibling relationship.

Below is a resolution adopted last month by the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioner and Directors, which the Department supported, regarding a sibling "Bill of Rights."

**Sibling Bill of Rights
Approved by NEYC January 2012**

Preamble: The New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors recognizes the importance and value of sibling relationships. These rights are intended to guide the New England Child Welfare agencies and their providers in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to permanency, safety and well being. This Bill of Rights was developed by the New England Youth Coalition with the support of this Association.

Whereas: the importance of sibling relationships are recognized and respected;

Whereas: sibling relationships provide needed continuity and stability during a child's placement;

Whereas: the sibling bond is unique and separate from the parent-child bond, and may include relations with people not linked by blood;

Whereas: siblings share similar history, heritage, culture and often biology that must be preserved;

Whereas: sibling separation is a significant and distinct loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact;

Whereas: every foster child deserves the right to know and be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives absent extraordinary circumstances.

Every foster child:

1. Shall be placed with siblings.

¹ DCF Policy 34-10-7.1

2. Shall be in close proximity to siblings if unable to be in same setting to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact.
3. Shall be afforded contact with siblings regardless of geographic barriers. The methods for contact should be outlined in the child's service plan.
4. Shall be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives and share celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations, and meaningful milestones.
5. Shall maintain consistent and regular contact that will be included in service planning.
6. Shall be included in permanency planning decisions relative to his/her siblings. Foster children should know what the expectations are for continued contact when a sibling is adopted or guardianed.
7. Shall be notified by the Child Welfare agency or its agents regarding a sibling's change of placement.
8. Shall be informed when a sibling is discharged from foster care. Alumni shall be allowed to maintain contact with a sibling who remains in state care.
9. Shall be supported by the Child Welfare agency in his/her efforts to maintain relationships with siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or guardianed. The Department shall facilitate such contact as appropriate.
10. Shall have predictable, regular contact with siblings that shall not be withheld as a behavioral consequence absent safety concerns.

S.B. No. 157 AN ACT REVISING THE DEFINITION OF A CHILD CARE FACILITY TO CONFORM WITH THE DEFINITION OF A CHILD

The Department of Children and Families supports the intent behind S.B. No. 157 - An Act Revising the Definition of a Child Care Facility to Conform with the Definition of a Child.

This bill revises the statutory definition of "child care facility" in section 17a-93 of the General Statutes to conform with the definition of a "child." This definition relates to those congregate care facilities licensed by DCF. This change is intended to be consistent with the provisions of the "Raise the Age" law. It would permit a youth up to twenty-one years of age who are in school or a job training program to be placed in a child care facility without requiring that they had been placed in a congregate residential setting prior to his eighteenth birthday.

The Department would like to work with the proponents of this legislation to tighten the language to clarify that it applies to youth who either were committed to the care and custody of DCF prior to their 18th birthday or are adjudicated delinquent for an offense committed prior to his or her 18th birthday.

S.B. No. 193 AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATED REPORTERS AND REQUIRING CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS CHECKS FOR YOUTH CAMP EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

The Department of Children and Families supports S.B. No. 193 - An Act Concerning Mandated Reporters and Requiring Criminal History Records Checks for Youth Camp Employees and Volunteers.

Last month, Commissioner Katz testified before the Select Committee on Children and the Judiciary Committee and said that that athletic coaches on all levels -- including youth and collegiate -- who have a great deal of interaction with children, should be included on the list of those mandated to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Currently, Connecticut's

H - 1145

**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2012**

**VOL.55
PART 23
7514 - 7863**

I move that this resolution be placed on the consent calendar.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

The motion before us is that this item be placed on the consent calendar.

Is there objection? Is there objection?

Hearing none, this item is placed on the consent calendar.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 494?

THE CLERK:

On page 28, Calendar 494, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, favorable report the Committee on Appropriations.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Representative Urban of the 43rd, you have the floor, madam.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move acceptance of the joint committees' favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the Senate.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

The question is -- question is on acceptance of the joint committees' favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the Senate.

Will you remark, madam?

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Clerk has in his possession an amendment, LCO Number 3989. It's a strike all amendment. I asked that he call it, and I'd be allowed to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 3989, which will be designated Senate Amendment Schedule "A."

THE CLERK:

LCO 3989, Senate "A" offered by Representative Urban, Gibbons, et al.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize the amendment.

Is there objection summarization? Is there objection to summarization?

Hearing none, Representative Urban, please proceed.

REP. URBAN (43rd):

Yes. This amendment emanates from the Foster

cd/sg/lg/sd/ev
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

650
MAY 8, 2012

Youth Capitol Day last fall, and it addresses siblings that are placed in foster care by DCF in different families. When the siblings the reside in the state, within 50 miles of each other, it requires DCF to arrange visitation on at least an average of once a week. It also directs DCF, through you working with our youth advisory boards, to create a Sibling Bill of Rights.

I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

The question before the Chamber is on adoption of Senate Amendment Schedule "A."

Will you remark further on amendment? Will you remark further on the amendment?

If not, let me try your minds.

All those in favor, please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Those opposed, nay.

The ayes have it.

The amendment is adopted.

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Urban, you have the floor.

cd/sg/lg/sd/ev
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

651
MAY 8, 2012

REP. URBAN (43rd):

I move that this resolution be placed on the
consent calendar.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

The motion before us is to place this item on the
consent calendar.

Is there objection? Is there objection?

Hearing none, this item is placed on the consent
calendar.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 496?

THE CLERK:

Also, on page 28, Calendar 496, Senate Bill
Number 195, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STORAGE OF STOLEN
PROPERTY, favorable report by the Committee on
Planning and Development.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Representative Dargan of the 115th, you have the
floor, sir.

REP. DARGAN (115th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move acceptance of the joint committees'
favorable report and passage of the bill in
concurrence with Senate.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

cd/sg/lg/sd/ev
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

674
MAY 8, 2012

On page 7, Calendar 219, House Bill Number 5148,
AN ACT CONCERNING AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS TO
VICTIMS OF THE CURRENT OPERATION OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
THAT RESULTS IN DEATH OR SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY.
DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

The distinguished Majority Leader, Representative
Sharkey.

REP. SHARKEY (88th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good to see you up there.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ARESIMOWICZ:

Thank you, sir.

REP. SHARKEY (88th):

Mr. Speaker, this represents the consent calendar
and for everyone's edification, I will be listing off
the calendar numbers in numerical order so that
everyone can follow. I'll try keep it -- and make
sure that I do it in numerical order. Thank you.

These will be: Calendar Number 90, Number 155,
Number 219, Number 223, Number 290, Number 320, Number
338, Number 345, Number 389, Number 430, Number 444,
Number 455, Number 467, Number 470, Number 475, Number
481, Number 485, Number 488, Number 489, Number 494,

cd/sg/lg/sd/ev
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

675
MAY 8, 2012

Number 496, Number 497, Number 505, Number 510, Number 513, Number 525, and Number 531.

I move adoption, I move adoption.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I move adoption of the consent calendar. I move the consent calendar.

(Speaker Donovan in the Chair.)

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The question before us is on passage of the bills on today's consent calendar.

Will you remark?

If not, staff and guests please come to the well the House. Members take their seats. The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber. The House is voting today's consent calendar by roll call. Members to the chamber please.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Have all members voted? Have all members voted?

Please check the roll call board to make sure your vote has been properly cast.

cd/sg/lg/sd/ev
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

676
MAY 8, 2012

If all members have voted, the machine will be locked, and the Clerk will take a tally.

The Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

On today's consent calendar

Total number voting	144
Necessary for passage	73
Those voting Yea	144
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	7

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The consent calendar passes.

Any announcements or introductions? Any announcements or introductions?

Is there any business on the Clerk's desk?

THE CLERK:

A list of Senate bills, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Representative Brendan Sharkey.

REP. SHARKEY (88th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that we waive -- waive the reading of the bills and have these items placed immediately on the House calendar.

S - 641

**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2012**

**VOL. 55
PART 6
1633 - 1960**

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

219
April 26, 2012

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes. Thank you, Madam President. The first item we like to mark is calendar page 8, Calendar 292, Senate Bill Number 156.

And then, Madam President, like to mark calendar page 3, Calendar 129, Senate Bill 224; Calendar page 3, Calendar 131, Senate Bill 335; Calendar page 6, Calendar 242 -- excuse me -- that one, delete reference to that one, Mr. President -- move to matters returned from committee, Calendar page 26, Calendar 72, Senate Bill 63; Calendar page 26, Calendar 73, Senate Bill 195; Calendar 26, Calendar 74, Senate Bill 196; Calendar page 31, Calendar 166, Senate Bill Number 162; calendar page 31, Calendar 167, Senate Bill 64. Would mark those items go and this time.

Madam President, there may be some additional items as well.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

At this time, Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 20 -- I'm sorry -- page 8, Calendar 292, Senate Bill Number 156, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, favorable report of the Committee on Human services.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana, good evening, ma'am.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Good evening, Madam President. I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

220
April 26, 2012

the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Yes, on acceptance and passage, will you remark further, please.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Yes, Madam President. The Clerk has an amendment, LCO Number 3922. Would he please call and I be allowed to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, 3922.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

I believe that's right.

THE CHAIR:

LCO Number 3922, Senate Amendment Schedule "A." It's offered by Senator Looney, et al.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Madam President, I have to amend that. There is a later amendment. I called the wrong LCO Number. If I may retract my request.

THE CHAIR:

It has been retracted, madam. Will you now tell me, Senator, what the number it of the new one?

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Yes I shall, Madam President. The LCO number is 3989.

THE CHAIR:

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

221
April 26, 2012

3989. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

(Inaudible).

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Thank you, Madam President. I move adoption.

THE CHAIR:

The motion is on adoption. Will you remark, please.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Yes, Madam President.

This is a strike all amendment replacing the underlying bill. We did this to address some concerns, particularly fiscal concerns about the underlying bill. This does however establish a policy for sibling visits for those children who are under the care of DCF who may have out-of-home placements. And it allows them to visit one another at least once a week if they live and reside within the state of Connecticut. Also we, in Section 2 of this amendment, establish a youth advisory board, which means the board established by each DCF regional office that is comprised of youth in out of home care.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark? Will you remark?

Senator Suzio.

SENATOR SUZIO:

Thank you, Madam President.

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

222
April 26, 2012

I rise to strongly support the amendment. This was a bill that had been discussed in the Children's Committee. We support of the bill. We recognize how important it is for young children to be in contact with their siblings, especially foster care situations and I want to strongly urge my colleagues to vote for the amendment. Thank you very much, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark?

If not -- oh, Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS:

Thank you, Madam President. If I may, just two quick questions to the proponent of the amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

Senator Witkos, please proceed.

SENATOR WITKOS:

Thank you. Through you, Madam President, would this pertain children that are still under the, I guess, custody of the state agency and they are placed in foster homes? Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Through you, Madam President I believe that's true.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS:

And thank you. Through you, Madam President the law

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

223
April 26, 2012

that we are about to pass, the amendment is very clear that the sibling shelters at least once -- not less than once per week and my question would be, what happens if a foster parent wants to take their children that they are and custody of on vacation and they are not available. They wouldn't be harmed in any manner because they weren't able to produce the once a week as required under the law because they want to take a foster child or the person in their care out-of-state on vacation or something. Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Through you, Madam President, in fact, no, we just a piece of legislation that actually sets in statute a process for the sort of special requests so we would know ahead of time and the commissioner -- caseworker through the commissioner's office could then approve that visit.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS:

Thank you.

Through the testimony of our public hearing, did you hear instances where a family would necessarily be denied the ability to take their own children plus any foster kids on vacation because they want to make sure that the other siblings that they are separated from has been visitation or as long as there is adequate given ahead of time it really shouldn't be an issue. Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

cah/mab/gbr
SENATE

224
April 26, 2012

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Through you, Madam President.

I believe, through you, that there shouldn't be any problem.

SENATOR WITKOS:

Thank you, Madam President. I thank the gentlewoman for answers.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark further? All in favor of the amendment please say aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

Opposed? The amendment passes.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, would move that the bill, as amended, be referred to the Committee on Appropriations.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President. For some additional markings, a couple of changes in markings. Going back to the items marked earlier, calendar page 3, Calendar 129 should be PT. Calendar page 3, Calendar 131, PT.

An additional go is calendar page 6, Calendar 242,

S - 643

**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2012**

**VOL. 55
PART 8
2276 - 2638**

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

61
May 2, 2012

the path and I'm proud and thankful to support this bill today. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you very much.

Will you remark? Will you remark? Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Thank you Madam President.

If there's no objection, I'd like this matter moved to our Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 27, Calendar 292, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. It's amended by Senate Amendment Schedule A and it's a favorable report of the Committees on Children, Human Services and Appropriations.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Thank you Madam President.

Madam President, I move the committee's joint favorable report and passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

The motion is on passage.

Will you remark?

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

62
May 2, 2012

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Yes, Madam President.

Madam President, the Clerk has an amendment, LCO Number 3989. Will he please call and I be allowed to summarize?

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

Senator (inaudible) has already been adopted by the Chamber previously.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Through you, Madam President, I forgot that. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you very much.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

You are absolutely correct, we did and then sent the bill on its way and now it's back here in the Chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Right.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

And we did adopt it and I appreciate that. This amendment is a strike all amendment. I did discuss it the last time and this sets a policy in place with our Department of Family and Children. It's a wonderful policy that will unite siblings who are under the care of the Department of Children and Families with each other in the state.

This is certainly a step in the right direction. You know many people in this Chamber and in the House are proponents of the legislation and recognize that keeping families together in a continuity of families and family contact is essential, essential for the good health, mental health and physical health if you will, of the children in our

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

63
May 2, 2012

state.

So with that, Madam President, I urge it -- well we already adopted -- I urge a vote.

Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

I have a question for you.

Will you remark? Senator Suzio.

SENATOR SUZIO:

Thank you Madam President, nice to see you again today, love that color on you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you very much, sir.

SENATOR SUZIO:

I rise in strong support of the bill before us and this was something discussed in Children's Committee. I think it's very important when -- for children to maintain contact with their siblings when they are in foster care and I want to urge passage by my colleagues here in the Circle.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

SENATOR SUZIO:

And thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

64
May 2, 2012

Yes, Madam Chairman.

We heartily support this amendment and bill but just one question just for clarification.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, Ma'am.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

Yes, through you, Madam President, to the Chair of the Committee, if she could just -- there was just one question about the -- the location and the travel time and so forth, would it be within the State of Connecticut or outside of the State of Connecticut?

Through you.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Through you, Madam President, this specifically addresses children who live within 50 miles of each other within the State of Connecticut. You know I just want to add we had discussed out-of-state visits on a regular basis. We'd like to get there someday but at this point in time this is for instate.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

Thank you very much, Madam President.

And I understand the -- the intent and the desire to have great flexibility in this but given the economic times we live in and this is a good step in the right direction and a compassionate and very positive beneficial step.

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

65
May 2, 2012

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Will you remark? Will you remark?

Senator Gerratana.

SENATOR GERRATANA:

Thank you Madam President.

Seeing no objection if this item would be moved to our
Consent Calendar please.

THE CHAIR:

Is there any objection? Seeing no objection, so ordered.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 22, Calendar 96, Senate Bill Number 213, AN ACT
CONCERNING INTERNET ACCESS FOR REGISTRARS OF VOTERS,
favorable report of the Committees on Government
Administration and Election, Appropriations and Planning
and Development.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Slossberg.

SENATOR SLOSSBERG:

Thank you Madam President.

I move the joint committee's favorable report and passage
of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is on passage.

Will you remark?

cah/meb/gdm/rgd/tmj
SENATE

252
May 2, 2012

House Bill 5123; on page 15, Calendar 401, House Bill 5516; on page 19, Calendar 421, House Bill 5107.

On page 21, Calendar 59, Senate Bill Number 97; also on page 21, Calendar 90, Senate Bill 188; on page 21, again, Calendar 72, Senate Bill 63; page 21, Calendar 73, Senate Bill 195; on page 22, Calendar 104, Senate Bill 207; on page 24, Calendar 197, Senate Bill Number 315; also on page 24, Calendar 183, Senate Bill 234.

Page 25, Calendar 208, Senate Bill 347; on page 25, Calendar 233, Senate Bill 371; on page 26, Calendar 275, Senate Bill 391; on page 27, Calendar 288, Senate Bill 299; on page 27, Calendar 292, Senate Bill 156; and on page 28, Calendar 333, Senate Bill Number 426.

THE CHAIR:

Okay. Mr. Clerk, would you please call for a roll call vote and the machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Senators please return to the Chamber. Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

If all members have voted -- all members voted. The machine will be closed. And Mr. Clerk, will you call this great tally?

THE CLERK:

On today's consent calendar.

Total Number voting	36	
Necessary for adoption	19	
Those voting Yea		36
Those voting Nay		0
Those absent and not voting	0	

THE CHAIR:

The consent calendar passed.