

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
April 4, 2007

TESTIMONY OF Aline Cronin, Foster and Adoptive Parent in Support of
SB 1269

Good Evening Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and Committee Members. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. I am here to speak in support of the SB 1269 and its goal of properly funding the Commission on Child Protection in order to improve the current system of representation for children in child protection matters.

I have been involved in working with children in DCF residential care facilities for over 25 years, including three years spent as a live-in house parent. I have also been a foster parent to a teenager and most recently to two young children.

One of the main differences between working with older versus younger kids, is that older children are usually able to express their needs to their worker, lawyer, or to the court. It is a very different story with very young children. These children don't have their own voice. DCF workers and their lawyer are their voice in court. If they don't advocate for the child, the child has no voice in court. It is imperative that the lawyer assigned to a child meet that child personally, and talk first-hand with those that have the knowledge of what is happening in the child's life. Taking this time will better ensure that the decisions made in the child's life are truly in their best interest.

While working with children in DCF care it was rare if ever that their court appointed attorneys came to visit them in the group homes or in my foster home. From what I observed through my involvement with these cases many of the attorneys had high case loads and not enough time to see the kids, and they often relied on the social worker for the information they provided to court.

I'd like to just briefly share with you my own experience about what a tremendous difference having an attentive, conscientious and effective attorney can make in the life of a child. When the aforementioned young children were with us in foster care, they had a lawyer that did not advocate for them in court. It was a very complicated case and this particular lawyer was blatantly inexperienced. She failed to act on the children's behalf when it was clear that there was a pressing need to address some serious concerns in their case. She told us herself, that she wasn't adequately advocating for them. As a result, in court, we were forced to request interventions and motions ourselves on the children's behalf. We called the court and informed them that a new lawyer should be assigned. We were told that foster parents could not request a new lawyer. Only DCF could assign a new lawyer. At this point DCF had changed case workers so

many times that they didn't have a clear picture of what was going on. As a result no new lawyer was appointed.

Our case took a positive turn when the children's lawyer left her practice and a new, well-qualified lawyer took over. She took the time to meet with the children and reviewed all aspects of the case. She advocated solely for their best interest after meeting with all parties involved.

We realize that the system is overwhelmed with cases, but it is paramount that it is remembered that we are talking about children's lives. Time to visit each child is critical in securing their best interest. It is vital to the well being and safety of all children in the system to have an office in place that allows for voices of concern to be heard and investigated.

I think it is important that the Commission on Child Protection be sufficiently funded so that the attorneys can have lower case loads and be able to put more time in on the cases and seeing their clients. The Commission also needs to be able to monitor the attorneys to make sure they are seeing their clients and advocating for them in court.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aline Cronin