



Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.

**Written Testimony of Maria Morelli-Wolfe in Support of S.B. 7172, An Act Reducing Educational Disruptions for Children and Youth in the Care or Custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF)**

I am Maria Morelli-Wolfe, an attorney with Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc., where I have represented low-income children and their families for nine years in the areas of child protection, education, and public benefits law. I respectfully urge the Committee to support S.B. 7172, which aims to reduce educational disruption to children and youth under DCF's care or custody.

Children and youth in DCF's care or custody, unfortunately, suffer a number of changes in placements throughout their time in DCF's care. They may, for example, move from a caretaker relative's home to a foster home, from one foster home to another, or from foster homes to emergency placements. A dozen changes in placements, or more, is not uncommon.

Under current law, each change in living arrangement not only creates a disruption to the home life of the child, but may cause a change in the child's educational placement if the new home is located in a different school district or is served by a different home school within the same district. Each educational disruption sets a child back academically, both in terms of making true academic progress and in terms of securing credit toward graduation.

The proposed bill seeks to minimize educational disruptions by allowing a child or youth to remain in his previous school until the end of the current academic year if the parent or guardian determines it is the child best interests. Essentially, the bill expands federal McKinney-Vento protections to include all children under DCF's care, not just those who are in "temporary shelters," thereby acknowledging the transiency of many children and youth in DCF's care and custody, and their need for educational stability.

In light of the above, I respectfully urge the Committee to support S.B. 7172 to reduce the educational disruptions for children and youth under the care or custody of DCF. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Prepared by:

Maria Morelli-Wolfe  
Greater Harford Legal Aid  
860-541-5042