



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 19, 2008

S.B. No. 703 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING COURT OPERATIONS AND RELATED MATTERS, PROTECTION ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS OF PATERNITY

The Department of Children and Families offers the following comments regarding S.B. No. 703 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING COURT OPERATIONS AND RELATED MATTERS, PROTECTION ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS OF PATERNITY.

DCF supports the language in section 3 of this bill which makes modifications to section 17a-101 of the General Statutes. First, it adds the words "*and neglect*" to subsection (a) to correct a serious omission in the current statute. This change is consistent with the language contained in other provisions of this same section as well as numerous other sections of the General Statutes related to the reporting of child abuse and neglect, including, but not limited to sections 17a-101a, 17a-101b, 17a-101d, 17a-101e, 17a-101f, 17a-101g, 17a-101h, 17a-101j, 17a-101k, 17a-103, 17a-103a, 17a-103c, 17a-106, 17a-106a and 17a-106b.

Also, subsection (b) of section 3 adds family relations counselors, family relations counselor trainees or family services supervisors employed by the Judicial Department, as well as school superintendents to the list of those professionals mandated by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect. DCF endorses the addition of these professionals to this important list. Mandated reporters are people in professions or occupations that have contact with children or whose primary focus is children. Mandated reporters are required to report or cause a report to be made when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused, neglected or is placed in imminent risk of serious harm. In reporting in good faith, they are immune from civil and criminal liability. However, failure to report could result in fines up to \$500.

DCF also supports the intent of the changes to the paternity statutes, particularly modifications contained in sections 27 and 28 of this bill which provides specific state agencies to share important paternity information. The Department is required by law to conduct a diligent search for birth fathers. Each year, the Department sees dozens of cases where paternity has been established in other court proceedings but that information is not available to DCF and we must file a separate action in juvenile court. We believe that this requires redundant efforts that are not in the best interest of children and unnecessarily adds to court dockets. DCF supports the suggested modification proposed by the Department of Public Health to limit access to this information to DCF staff attorneys.