

Public Hearing: HB5691, an Act Concerning Postsecondary Tuition Assistance and Special Need Subsidies for Adopted Children

Date of Hearing: 2/24/09

Good Afternoon Committee Chairs and Members of the Committee, my name is Monique Russo. I reside in the town of Hebron and I am an adoptive parent to three children of whom I originally met while facilitating foster care for them. I am here today to testify on House/Senate Bill 5691, An Act Concerning Postsecondary Tuition Assistance and Special Need Subsidies for Adopted Children. I am here in support of the bill.

House/Senate Bill HB 5691 will...

- Offer my children the same educational opportunities awarded to other State of Connecticut children that share a similar history. Our adoption became permanent in April of 2004. The college tuition assistance was approved several months after and only approved children for eligibility if they were adopted after December of 2004. Based on an eight month discrepancy my three children have been ruled in eligible. Their personal histories are no different than any of the current eligible children. They have been simply eliminated for eligibility strictly based on the previous date established for eligibility. I am a single mother of three adoptive biological children. Currently the active bill does not take any household dynamics into consideration. If one child was adopted after 12/04 to a two parent income household, this child would be eligible for the college tuition assistance regardless of the total household income or how many other children reside in the household. I am asking that this committee take into consideration the overall dynamics within a household. I am a single parent of three, living off of a single income but my children have been ruled in eligible for any tuition assistance. These current eligibility guidelines are not fair nor equitable to many of the children unfairly eliminated based on a specified date or to the adoptive parents whose income and total dependants within the household are never taken into consideration when factoring in the eligibility criteria for assistance. I am requesting that this committee take these household dynamics into consideration now and also afford my children the same opportunities that others in their shared situation have been granted.
- My daughter sits now next to me; my two sons and their Grandmother sit behind me. As a family we discussed their participation in this public hearing today. As a parent I am very proud that we sit before you today, as a family, advocating collectively regarding their futures. Although my children have been through much adversity within their short life time, it has not stopped them from striving to be the best young adults, citizens, friends, sons and daughters they can be. For many years they lived within a system where they felt different and not worthy of parental, educational or societal attention based solely on environmental factors they have had no control over. They have worked very hard to overcome these adversities and have challenged themselves to become productive students, athletes and valued members of our society. I ask this committee not to let a simple eligibility date factor into their goals of obtaining a higher level of education for themselves. Please do not allow a simple final adoption date limit my children's college opportunities in the future. They have worked hard and share in the State of Connecticut's vision that these children in fact are very worthy of this cause and deserve a fair opportunity to achieve their college dreams.
- On a professional note, I have worked in law enforcement for the past fourteen years of my career. I have had the privilege to serve within a State capacity and have worked with many under privileged troubled teens as well as managed endless adult criminal offenders. My professional experience has taught me that one cannot put a price on an education nor its value regarding an individual's success to become a productive member of our society.

Some of these offenders I manage are products of the State of Connecticut's foster care system. I often wonder if these individuals had the same educational opportunities back then in their youth would their futures have been altered. Unfortunately they did not. These individuals are still dependents of the State of Connecticut now being funded by our Department of Social Services, Department of Correction, Probation or Parole after their graduation from the Department of Children and Family Services. If Connecticut had this vision earlier how many of these individuals may have become productive citizens instead? This Bill finally sets Connecticut apart from many other States. It proves that as a State we are capable of developing proactive programs for our youth and implementing education within our system instead of historically relying on reactive measures such as the creation of building more prisons within our communities. Equally as important, this Bill has accountability factors programmed in to maintain ones eligibility. It also calls for mandatory financial contribution and proof of a maintaining a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average for any of the potential benefactors. For those who are motivated and seek to break the cycle of their past this lends an excellent opportunity to those whom may never have had a chance otherwise. This Bill promotes discipline, accountability, opportunity, education and potentially offers a very bright future to those who are attempting to alter and break the cycle of their dependency on State resources. In fact, in review of this Bill as a whole, this Bill is truly priceless when it comes to potentially altering a under privileged child's adult future.

- In closing, I ask you to please not allow a child to be discriminated against simply on a predetermined eligibility date. A child that is a product of our great State of Connecticut should demand more respect and consideration from us as a society. I ask that you afford every adoptive child the same post secondary tuition opportunities regardless of their final adoption dates.
- Lastly, I thank the Committee Chairs and Members of the Committee for the opportunity for myself and children to testify before you today.

Sincerely,



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