

Public Hearing: 2-24-09

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Testimony on HB 5691

Good Morning, Senator Handley, Representative Willis and Honorable Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Wendy Sander. I am an adoptive parent and I reside in the town of Madison, CT. I am **writing in support of House Bill 5691**, An Act Concerning Postsecondary Tuition Assistance and Special Need Subsidies for Adopted Children.

My husband and I where licensed as pre-adoptive parents through the Department of children and families in 2001. After a long wait for an adoptive placement, our son came to live with us in 2005 and we all became a forever family. Our son lived in three other foster homes, not counting his birth parents and ours, so that is five different families, five different relationships that he had to build (and 4 that he had to leave),and five different times he had to wonder even though he misses his birth parents dearly, am I going to stay in this home? He entered foster care at about 3 ½ years old and remained in foster care until July of 2007 (approximately 4 ½ years in foster care). He also visited with his siblings while in foster care and still remains connected and visits his 4 other siblings (6 siblings in all, I will explain 6 shortly) as well as having visits with his birth parents until about the age of 6 ½. Not long before our son's adoption was to happen, a sixth sibling was born, our now adopted daughter. DCF called and explained that a baby girl (our son's sister) was born. The asked if we would like to adopt our son and his baby sister who came to us at just 3 weeks old, and we were blessed for a second time and where able to keep at least part of a sibling group together and remain as connected as we can with his other 4 sisters and brothers.

Our son has struggled with many issues through his young life. He was separated from his four other siblings (he knows them all), separated from his birth mom and dad (and still on a level, internalizes that some how it was his fault they were removed). He also struggles with his education due to emotional issues from his past, but somehow he braves every day trying to focus and make it through the best he can. When he moved to Madison with us as a foster child, we held a PPT with his new school and reviewed his levels and testing and both the school and my husband and I could clearly see that it was in his best interest to have him stay back a year (from second back to first grade). He is still below his grade level, but the word COLLEGE is never left out of the conversation in our home. With such a helpful and supportive school system and working together as a team, our son has shown enormous improvement on an educational level as well as emotion level. I have always talked about college to him, even when he was six, and I ask, "What college do you think you want to go to? He has recently at the age of 10, chose UCONN.

Saying all of that, we can NEVER GIVE UP! We always read to him and talk of college and what he might want to be as an adult. I don't want the word college to be a "foreign" word to him, I don't want him to think, "I will never be able to do that". Children need to know that adults believe in them and that they can do it!

Having adopted a sibling group after the date restriction of January 2005, our children are eligible for this benefit, and if this were not the case then our son and daughter, like so many other adopted children would have been denied to financial means that would afford them the assistant they need to strive as productive members of our society. All of these children are tomorrow's future that we need to invest in dearly.

Although our hope are for our son and daughter to carry on their education beyond high school, due to our son's unfortunate experiences in his life, he will most likely graduate high school after 18 years of age and then hopefully if he chooses go onto a postsecondary education of some kind. Our family falls below the Connecticut median income, so financially it is going to be a struggle and this is where our family would benefit from and extend special needs subsidy up until the age of 23 if he is still in high school or a postsecondary education. I also feel that regardless of the date a child has been adopted through the state, they should all have the opportunity to go onto college or a trade school if they choose.

I hear of other bills this legislative session that aim to encourage people to choose careers that fall short of enough qualified workers in certain fields. By supporting HB5691, you will help give the state the qualified workers that it is saying it needs and desires!

If we support these children, in-turn they will return this favor by getting a deserved education, contributing back to the community in a positive way and building their self esteem, and all in hopes that they too some day will "pass it forward" and help others in need.

I ask that you fully support HB5691. Even though parents like us can love and give our children a life long family of their own and support them through all of their struggles and be there for them when they have a hard day, a postsecondary education is unfortunately financially out of reach for many of these families.

By supporting this bill, we can only build a stronger Connecticut and a brighter future for our children! Please do not let a postsecondary education only be a DREAM for our son and daughter and all of the other children adopted through the state foster care program or in subsidized guardianships. Please, BELIEVE in our State's children, MAKE COLLEGE A REALITY FOR THEM AND MAKE A DREAM COME TRUE!

Thank you for your time and consideration. Once again, I ask that you support HB5691.

Sincerely,

Wendy Sander
Adoptive Parent