

5842

Committee on Human Services

Proposed H.B. No. 5842 In Favor

Public Hearing

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli
Chief Child Protection Attorney

Good Morning Senator Doyle and Representative Walker and distinguished Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard regarding House Bill 5842 which I hope will be enacted swiftly. DCF, the State Department of Education, and others involved in child welfare have already begun collaborating through a Steering Committee on implementing P.L. 110 – 351, a recently enacted federal statute that requires case plans and procedures to improve educational stability and outcomes for children in DCF care. It is important that the Connecticut legislature act to ensure this federal mandate is complied with in a timely manner.

I would additionally recommend that perhaps this bill be amended to more closely mirror the federal statute and require the promulgation of compliance regulations pursuant to the work of the Steering Committee.

If the State of Connecticut can successfully reduce the number of foster children who experience unnecessary and detrimental school transitions and the number of school disruptions for those children who must change schools, it will have taken a significant step towards effectively helping foster children achieve their full potential. Necessary transfers should be at natural times during the school year and be planned and orderly, ensuring continuity of any IEP at the new school.

This legislation will mean so much to those children who find themselves one moment living a challenging life, perhaps ignored much of the time, hungry part of the time, berated or hit for every transgression, tired because their home is noisy, confused by Mom's mood swings, traumatized from constant battles between their parents. A child with this life's only solace may be the bus ride to school with friends, a caring teacher, goals set for him to achieve, lunchtime, and the structure and predictability of the school day. The next moment he can find himself being lead by a stranger into a car, his Mom crying, screaming maybe, some clothes thrown in a plastic bag, he takes a long ride with a stranger who's trying to explain what it all means, he's introduced to his foster mom and dad,

shown a strange room and bed to sleep in, there are strange kids sharing the room, but he's all alone, shocked, scared and confused.

How incredible it will be if Connecticut ensures that he gets brought to his own school the next day – his entire life isn't shattered, he still gets to see his friends, his teacher smiles at him and asks him to let her know if he needs anything, he has his work to do, things he needs to learn for him, for his future. If he acts out because of the trauma he's experienced, the fear and anger he's feeling, he'll be treated with understanding and be offered help and support, not labeled a behavioral problem and disciplined.

We need to do this for every foster child whenever possible, as soon as possible.

I respectfully request that the Committee vote in favor of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Signorelli