



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
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COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
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**RAISED BILL NO. 6148, AN ACT CONCERNING RIGHTS OF JUVENILES UNDER
THE SUPERVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Good morning Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Christine Rapillo and I am the Director of Juvenile Delinquency Defense for the Office of the Chief Public Defender. I am here today on behalf of the Chief Public Defender to speak in support of *Raised Bill No. 6148, An Act Concerning Rights of Juveniles under the Supervision of the Department of Children and Families*.

The Office of the Chief Public Defender supports legislatively establishing the rights granted to children under the supervision of the Department of Children and Families. Juvenile courts are said to preside in the best interest of children but "best interest" is a vague and highly subjective term. There currently exist no objective, statutory criteria to guide the court in determining what is actually best for the individual child. Families and children being removed from them should know what to expect during the course of their commitment. The services and assessments guaranteed under *Raised Bill No. 6148* create important expectations that if met, will enhance the child's chance at successful integration back in to their families and communities.

Children involved the Department of Children and Families often suffer from behavioral problems and mental health issues that lead them into trouble with their schools, their parents and sometimes the police. **Raised Bill No. 6148** will ensure that basic constitutional rights are not ignored because the state has become the custodian of the child. Too often, children in DCF's custody run in to criminal legal problems and the Department does nothing to protect their rights to counsel or against self incrimination. Social workers with no legal training provide law enforcement with access to children and encourage children to cooperate without consulting counsel or considering the consequences for that child. DCF is responsible for the protection of all committed children even those who are accused of or suspected of

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crimes while in their care. Passage of Raised Bill 6148 will ensure that a child in state custody gets all the same protections that a supportive, loving family would provide.

Regardless of whether a child is committed through the child protection process or because of a delinquency conviction, the overarching goal is to have the child leave the custody of the Department safer, healthier and more able to successfully survive at home. Parents whose children are committed due to abuse or neglect are given expectations to meet before they can regain custody. Children who are committed as delinquents face court ordered conditions to follow before they can reintegrate home. Although crafted as a "bill of rights", what **Raised Bill No. 6148** actually does is set out expectations for the Department to follow in dealing with the children in their custody. This will make everyone accountable and should result in the best possible outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families. The Office of the Chief Public Defender urges this committee to favorable report on this important proposal.