



## CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

A PRIVATE NONPROFIT CORPORATION

153 WILLIAMS STREET NEW LONDON, CT 06320

TELEPHONE (860) 447-0323

FAX (860) 443-0109

E-MAIL: NEWLONDON@CONNLEGALSERVICES.ORG

JOHN P. SPILKA  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

ELIZABETH BROOKS  
JAMES HASLAM  
NATALIA PLANELL  
KAREN L. SEARS  
ROYAL STARK  
MELANIE STARKS  
MARY VON DORSTER  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

LORRAINE L. DUGAS  
PARALEGAL

MINERVA CRUZ  
PAMELA WEINSTEIN  
LEGAL ASSISTANT

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
62 WASHINGTON STREET  
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457  
(860) 344-0447

AARON BAYER  
BOARD CHAIR

STEVEN D. EPPLER-EPSTEIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### LAW OFFICES

211 STATE STREET  
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604

587 MAIN STREET  
NEW BRITAIN, CT 06051

153 WILLIAMS STREET  
NEW LONDON, CT 06320

20 SUMMER STREET  
STAMFORD, CT 06901

85 CENTRAL AVENUE  
WATERBURY, CT 06702

872 MAIN STREET  
WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226

### SATELLITE OFFICES

5 COLONY STREET  
MERIDEN, CT 06451

62 WASHINGTON STREET  
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457

98 SOUTH MAIN STREET  
SOUTH NORWALK, CT 06854

564 PROSPECT STREET  
TORRINGTON, CT 06790

155 WEST MAIN STREET  
Rockville, CT 06066

## TESTIMONY OF CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES, INC. IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 6497, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL STABILITY FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Melanie Starks and I am an attorney in the Children at Risk Unit of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS). The Children at Risk Unit at CLS provides legal representation to low-income families who have children with disabilities, primarily to assist in obtaining access to special education and mental health services.

### CLS urges the Education Committee to enact Bill 6497, An Act Concerning Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.

Connecticut has approximately 5,880 children in out-of-home care provided by the state's Department of Children and Families. Last year, several youth who had been placed in out-of-home care participated in a forum sponsored by CT Voices and Casey Family Programs where they talked to legislators about the difficulties they faced when their school placement changed. The youth expressed a desire for measures to allow them to maintain their school placement.

It is most often in a child's best interest to experience educational stability and continuity. Yet, children in foster care are often highly mobile, with over a third of young adults reported having had 5 or more school changes.<sup>1</sup> As a result, "children in foster care are struggling academically", with "frequent school changes [being] associated with an increased risk of failing a grade in school and of repeated behavior problems."<sup>2</sup>

This bill aims to provide the children in Connecticut's foster care system with the educational stability and continuity that is critical to their academic success. Without stability and continuity, the job of educators becomes more difficult. Moreover, maintaining school placement proves less costly for schools as "students transferred mid-year often must be

<sup>1</sup> American Bar Association, Legal Center for Foster Care & Education Fact Sheet, viewed on February 25, 2008, [www.abanet.org/child/education](http://www.abanet.org/child/education).

<sup>2</sup> Id.



enrolled in expensive special education programs to catch up with their new classmates.”<sup>3</sup>

The proposed legislation would allow foster children to remain in their home schools, as long as it is in the child’s best interest. If there was any disagreement over what is in a child’s best interest, the juvenile court judge would make the final decision. DCF would be responsible for the transportation to the child’s previous school district.

This is the model that has been used successfully in the state of Oregon, in which the foster care population is most similar in size to that of Connecticut. Since adopting similar legislation in 2005, Oregon has reported a successful and well-received initiative with modest costs.<sup>4</sup>

At this time, it is critical that Connecticut make these efforts to improve educational outcomes for the children in its foster care system. Unfortunately, the cost of continuing to ignore this problem will result in further dropouts, illiteracy and underperformance.

**Therefore, CLS strongly urges the Joint Committee on Education to support Bill 6497, An Act Concerning Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.**

---

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut Voices for Children, *Fostering School Stability for Children in Connecticut's Care*, December 2007, viewed on February 25, 2008, <http://www.ctkidslink.org/publications/ece07educationalstability.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Id.