

**Testimony of Vanessa Gonzalez in Support of H.B. 6497, An Act Concerning
Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care**

In these times of fiscal crisis, I know that the legislature has many priorities and many earnest citizens wanting to be heard. So I thank you for your time and consideration. I have had the privilege to be invited here, in the past, to speak to the merits of the Educational Stability Act and am grateful to have the opportunity to do so again. My name is Vanessa Gonzalez. I am 22 years old, a proud mother and a full time student at St. Joseph College. I have lived in over 20 placements and changed schools more than 10 times. Because of continued disruptions, I struggle with the shame of not being able to master basic math principles and study skills. These gaps only furthered my frustration and fear of failure in an educational system that seemingly forgot about me. I still struggle with them daily in my college career. However I persevere because I know the benefits of a four-year degree and it is well worth the fight.

Educational stability is vital to success in school and long-term success in life. Connecticut's Department of Children and Families offers to pay for college, yet it does not and cannot guarantee that the foster youth in their care have the ability to take advantage of this opportunity. Foster youth face many obstacles in our day-to-day lives. We have to worry about where we are going to live, adjust to new rules, new families, and new communities and on top of that a new school and peer group. A new school is a daunting change in and of itself. Combine that with lost transcripts, lack of transportation, learning gaps and little or no continuity or support, you have a recipe for failure. And that is the worst part of it all. We have smart, creative, hard working youth, struggling and too often failing, not because of their own shortcomings but those of the systems around them.

The state of Connecticut is the legal guardian to the thousands of foster youth in care; all we ask is that the state take on this responsibility as any concerned parent would. And yes this means investing time and money, but it will be money well spent. Approving this bill would also be sending Connecticut's foster youth a clear message. A message that tells us that you hear us, you care and that you are going to take action. Educational stability is one of the most challenging problems facing Connecticut's foster youth today. I am here today speaking on behalf of the thousands of youth who don't have a voice. I hope that my words and those of the other foster youth here today have enlightened you to the importance of this issue and that with that knowledge you will ensure the funding that is necessary to provide this essential service to Connecticut's foster youth.