

Good afternoon, my name is Mary Eckerson, and I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5691, An Act Concerning Post Secondary Tuition Assistance and Special Needs Subsidies for Adopted Children. Thank you for being here today, I think it is a courageous act to even consider this Bill in these tough economic times.

Last year I spoke about my oldest son, Chris, this year I will speak about my second son, Kyle. My husband and I have adopted five of our foster children, so I have testimony for years to come!

We had been foster parents for about 1 year when the DCF matcher called and asked if we would take another baby as a foster care placement. It would only be for a few weeks. We already had a 7 month old, but took Kyle anyway, figuring we could handle anything for a couple of weeks. Kyle had been diagnosed as failure to thrive, at three months he should have more than doubled his birth weight, instead he had gained just a few ounces. We thought he looked like one of the little birds that fell out of a tree, pale and scrawny. When babies are neglected, they often do not respond to outside stimulation, so Kyle would not smile or engage in any way. Obviously, the lack of stimulation and nourishment had devastating effects on Kyle's brain development. His IQ has been tested as borderline mentally disabled, he has a language disability, ADD and learning disabilities.

So, why am I here requesting Post Secondary Tuition Assistance? First, he stayed more than two weeks and, second, because, never, never before has more been done with less. Two minutes cannot possibly come close to summing up 18 years of hard work, determination and grit. Certainly, thanks to DCF and the State of CT, the Town of Simsbury, Kyle has been provided with all the supports that would help him succeed. But, I have heard over and over, year after year, how impressed Kyle's teachers are with his commitment to his education. He is on the honor roll at Simsbury High School, taking regular classes, he has earned his Varsity letter in Cross Country. He is a beloved older brother. He is a 17 year old son who asks "Mom, Is there anything else I can do for you before I go out?"

So, please continue to support this bill, please fight hard for this boy who has been fighting all his life. He has earned the chance at a college education.

In her school's celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, my daughter recited a quote, "The time is always right to do what is right."