

2139 Silas Deane Highway  
Suite 205  
Rocky Hill, Ct. 06067  
(860) 257-8066 (telephone)  
(860) 257-8074 (fax)

Sherry Ostrout, MSW, CMC, President  
Stephen A. Karp, MSW, Executive Director  
[www.naswct.org](http://www.naswct.org)

**Human Services Committee  
Public Hearing  
February 23, 2010**

**SB 155, HB 5066**

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Sarah Chasse, and I am testifying on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW/CT) Children and Families Committee, in support of SB 155 and HB 5066 on Educational Stability for foster youth.

While facilitating an advocacy group of foster youth in 2008, I spoke with several young men and women about the policy process, and had them select the issue they saw as most pressing within the foster care system at present. The youth felt strongly that educational instability was the root of many other issues, and if corrected could have the most impact on future generations of foster youth. What was originally intended as an educational exercise led to a meeting with Representative Walker, which then resulted in the proposal of SB 159 in the February 2008 Session.

The youth delivered dynamic testimony before the Select Committee on Children on their experiences with educational instability during their time in foster care. One of the girls in the group had already attended over fourteen schools, not all of which she could even name. When the federal legislation, Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 passed later that year, we were all thrilled to see educational stability was included, and would now be mandated for states. In order to be in accordance with this legislation, Connecticut must now adopt an educational stability system by July 1st of this year.

This is important on several levels. When children are removed from their homes into foster care, almost every aspect of their lives that has provided stability and support is no longer available. When children are removed from the school they have been attending, they lose connections to friends, teachers, and other caring adults in their lives. This compounds the feelings of loss and anxiety the child often feels from living in a new place.

Removing children from their schools of origin not only affects these vulnerable children emotionally, but also has a serious negative impact on their educational success. Studies show that it takes children between three and six months to completely adjust academically when they switch schools. Inconsistencies in academic curriculum and requirements between school systems make it increasingly more difficult to ensure that transfer students are receiving a comprehensive and adequate education. Research comparing transfer students to students that have been in the same school since first grade, confirms that transfer students are, on average, a year and a half behind their peers in reading. Research also shows that students who switch schools at least once in their educational career are less likely to graduate than students that remained in the same school.

The overwhelming evidence presented by researchers that students who switch schools throughout their educational career are at a higher risk of failing is even more troubling when considering the amount of foster children that are forced to move multiple times. Some youth have cited as many as twenty school moves. It is no surprise, therefore, that these children have a hard time succeeding in academics at their new

schools. Allowing foster children to remain in their schools of origin even when they are placed out of the district, would greatly increase their chance of success by giving them the opportunity to bond with their peers, and have the consistent curriculum they need to be successful and knowledgeable students.

The current practice of uprooting children from their schools of origin whenever their placement changes not only negatively impacts these youth, but also affects all of the other children in the classroom. It is extremely difficult for teachers to adequately educate their students when they are forced to accommodate new children mid-year. The disruption caused by the teachers' efforts to bring their new pupil up to speed on material the class has already covered negatively affects the other students because they are not able to cover as much material during the school year.

The delay in curriculum is not the only negative impact of transfer students on the class as a whole, however. Students that change schools frequently are at an increased risk of failing a grade and displaying behavioral problems. When students are behind academically or are unable to keep up with the pace of the classroom, they often begin to exhibit behavioral problems because they are attempting to deflect the attention from the fact that they do not know the material. Teachers are rarely given adequate training or support to prepare them for the task of accommodating these new students.

There is much at stake. For many foster youth, their educational, emotional, and future economic success are on the line. For educators and other children in the classroom, their ability to teach and learn effectively are suffering. For Connecticut, it is a matter of losing more than \$230 million dollars of Title IV-E reimbursements from the federal government if the state is not in compliance with federal law. Please support SB 155 and HB 5066 to ensure that none of this is compromised.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.