

S.B. No. 353 Foster Parent Bill of Rights

Testimony of Karen [REDACTED]
Foster Parent

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Karen [REDACTED], I am a foster parent from Waterbury, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the foster parents bill of rights. My husband and I have been foster parents over four years; recently we adopted our 4 year old daughter [REDACTED] currently we have no other children in our care.

As rewarding as it is to be a foster parent, it is also difficult and challenging. My husband and I actively participate in the monthly support group meetings.

During the meetings we frequently hear the same complaints from frustrated foster parents who feel they are not respected, valued, or heard.

It is my hope that this bill will help to advance communication between foster parents and social workers so foster parents will feel more confident in advocating for the changes they would like to see, and in affect advocating for the children they care for. Further, an increase in rights for foster parents will ultimately lead to increased recruitment of foster families.

By listening to other foster parents I have heard the following common complaints that foster parents:

- Are not told about children's past history;
- Have difficulty getting children into therapy
- There is strong concern about voicing complaints for fear of losing children placed in homes.

When I first discussed this bill with Linda Towbin in Senator Crisco's office she encouraged me to submit the bill, even if I did it anonymously. I decided not to remain anonymous; I do not believe change comes through anonymity.

With this bill foster parents will know they no longer need to fear repercussion for speaking out and they will have access to a committee to file a grievance.

It was the first placement in my home that left me questioning if I would continue to foster and where can foster parents go to appeal for help.

I am sharing this experience not to place blame, but to illustrate the challenges foster parents face and the need for the bill.

Shortly after my husband and I were licensed we agreed to take in a 13 year old girl. When we met her we liked her very much and hoped to adopt her. Her social worker told us she was very well behaved and did well in school; her only problem was she was a little boy crazy. I thought that was normal for a 13 year-old girl.

After she moved in with us we quickly realized she had severe problems and our training left us unqualified to help her. In time, we learned that she suffered from Reactive Attachment Disorder; I had never heard of this disorder and found myself reading everything I could about it. She was highly sexualized and my husband could not be alone in a room with her. I received constant phone calls from her school notifying me that she was cutting classes; she destroyed personal property and completely disregarded our household rules. At the end of a month, we did not feel safe in our own home. We were devastated and we were completely misled about her mental health history and her past. To add to our distress, the case worker called me a coward. I was later informed that prior to her placement with us, this child had been removed from a therapeutic home and that the therapeutic agency fought the caseworker's decision to place her with us. It was their opinion that this girl could not live in a household with any male members.

This bill will help prevent situations like this from happening by ensuring that foster parents will have disclosure of a child's history that is relevant to their behavioral development.

I urge you to pass this bill to empower foster parents to request help, advocate for the children and encourage them to renew their licenses and recruit new families into the foster system. I thank you for your consideration.