



*A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the  
Connecticut General Assembly*

Testimony of

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Connecticut Commission on Aging

Select Committee on Children

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Thank you for this opportunity to comment on **HB 5161, An Act Requiring the Training of the Staff of the Department of Children and Families on Grandparent Visitation Rights.**

The Connecticut Commission on Aging is a nonpartisan state agency that is part of the legislative branch of government. We are devoted to preparing our state for a burgeoning aging population while promoting policies that enhance the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For over sixteen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities.

As part of our statutory mandate set forth in CGS §17b-420, the Connecticut Commission on Aging reviews and comments on proposed state legislation and the budget. Additionally, our statute requires that we gather and maintain data on, and make recommendations for progress on, the following Results-Based Accountability results statements: that all older adults are healthy, safe, economically self-sufficient and free from discrimination and that they achieve educational fulfillment.

The Commission on Aging was pleased to be invited recently by this Committee and the Select Committee on Aging to participate in a forum on the rights of grandparents. As was abundantly clear at that forum, intergenerational interaction is beneficial for both older adults and young children, providing socialization, intellectual stimulation, connection to culture and history, reduced instances of depression and numerous emotional benefits.

Unfortunately, family discord often prevents this often beneficial interaction, which ideally would occur without the mandate of government or courts. This Committee, and the Select Committee on Aging, heard from numerous grandparents who had not seen their grandchildren in years—heartbreaking stories of families torn apart. However, both federal and state court decisions (including *Troxel v. Granville*) have placed restrictions on visitation rights, deferring instead to parents' rights of choice in how to raise their children.

This legislation provides a path for some families to achieve visitation rights with facilitation from the staff at the Department of Children and Families. It would require that appropriate DCF staff be trained in current state statutes regarding family notification of the removal of a child, as well as in the process for seeking visitation rights in court.

The Commission believes this first step could help some individuals and families, by keeping them better informed of their rights.

We ask for your support.

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