

March 2, 2010

The Honorable Anthony Musto
Select Committee on Children
Room 011, Capitol Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Raised Bill Number 5313: An Act Concerning Visitation By Grandparents

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee Chair:

My name is LoriAnn Grove. I am here today to testify today as a grandmother, who has been unreasonably denied visitation and as Master level Social Worker advocating for change.

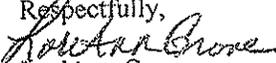
I object to the proposed language used in HB 5313. This language is no different than what is already stated for third party visitation. Grandparents are not looking to amend 46b-59, Grandparents want a new statute to be drafted with specific criteria and court guidance pertaining to grandparents and visitation of their grandchildren.

The current criteria that grandparents have to prove a "parental in nature relationship" over a substantial period of time should not be heavily weighed. Grandparents are seeking visitation with our grandchildren; not custody. Grandparents have a very significant role in a child's life without having developed a "parental-like" relationship. Visitation laws are needed to protect the grandparent-grandchild relationship who have been "UNREASONABLY DENIED VISITATION" after a relationship had been formed and acknowledged by the parent.

When a child has an existing bond with the grandparents, it should not be broken. What about a child's right to his/her biological family? Too often people forget that children still feel heartache and loss. There is an assumption that a "fit parent" acts in their child's best interest. What kind of "fit parent" would ever sever an emotional bond that was recognized by the parent as being important in the life of their own child? I would like to question, is this in the child's best interest or the best interest of all parties involved?

Last the criteria "the child would suffer real and substantial harm or neglect" must be eliminated. Connecticut is the only state that uses "substantial harm or neglect" as a criteria. This is impossible to prove.

AARP reported in October 2007 that there are 39,797 children living in Grandparent-headed households and another 12,406 children living in households headed by other relatives totaling 52,203 children or 6.2% of all children in the state.¹ I wonder how many more grandchildren are living their grandparents in the past two years? When a child in Connecticut is abused/neglected and/or removed from the home of their parents, who does Connecticut embrace to step in and provide love, stability and care for their grandchildren? Connecticut supports grandparents and extended family with open arms. Grandparents seem to be used by the state as a means of a "placement" of their children's children, only after harm to the child has been substantiated. Yet grandparents don't have right to visit their grandchildren. Connecticut does not seem to recognize the importance between grandchildren and grandparents having a right to visit and foster a positive loving relationship. The message Connecticut sends to grandparents is a very contradictory. Grandparents are worthy as a placement option but when it comes to grandparents right, we are mistreated by the laws and courts. My question to this committee, are grandparents valuable in a child's life or not?

Respectfully,

LoriAnn Grove

¹ AARP Foundation. Connecticut Grandfacts, October 2007, 9/08<www.grandparentfactsheets.org/state_fact_sheets.cfm>