



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

Testimony of

**Julia Evans Starr, Executive Director**  
Connecticut Commission on Aging

Select Committee on Children

February 23, 2010

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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Phone: 860.240.5200 • Website [www.cga.ct.gov/coa](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coa)  
LTC website: [www.ct.gov/longtermcare](http://www.ct.gov/longtermcare)



Richard Faucher  
70 Shadycrest Dr  
East Hartford, CT 06118  
860-568-8460

AB 5/16/1

Dear Madam/Sir:

We were with our grandson and granddaughter from the day they were born—six solid years. We were completely bonded with the grandchildren and they with us.

The home our son had asked us to purchase was all set to go. The grandchildren were full of ideas of what it would be like living with Memere and Pepere and CB (our cat): and in "ONE DAY" the grandchildren were completely taken away from us.

In the last conversation with our son, his reply to us was: 'I will fix this both ways...I will also tell the children (our grandchildren) that it is you, the grandparents, who do not wish to see them or call them'.

No one has seen them or heard about them since then. This is not right.

Thank you.

Suzanne Faucher  
70 Shadycrest Dr  
East Hartford, CT 06118  
860-568-8460

HB  
5/16/1

Dear Madam/Sir:

We have a 6 yr old grandson and his little sister is 4 yrs old. From the day they were born we have been their only babysitter. We would babysit every Monday, Wednesday and Friday while mom and dad were at work. We had them for sleepovers at our house almost every weekend. Our last year with them, 2008, they stayed at our home three out of four weekends a month. That same year our son asked that we purchase a home large enough for all of us to move in together.

January 2009 our son and his wife found a home in Ellington and on the third Sunday of January 2009 we (the grandparents) bid on that home and that Tuesday our bid was accepted. Tuesday night and Wednesday our son's behavior became quite irrational and our daughter in law's actions quite uncontrollable. I requested from our son that I please be allowed to prepare my own home for the realtor to show, therefore, being unable to babysit the next day and Friday. He completely lost it and called his father at work and told him that I should not do such a thing. That Friday night our son had our grandson call us at our home and this was the conversation: the child was crying uncontrollably and said: "Memere, daddy says that I can no longer see you and call you on the phone anymore. Why?" Like in previous mommy daddy questions I replied to our grandson: 'mommy and daddy are the boss; as soon as I have a chance I will speak with daddy'.

Our grandson was still crying uncontrollably...and then in the background our son screamed to our grandson: 'you did what you were told to do, now hang up the g---d---phone'. Our grandson did not immediately hang up the phone, then our daughter in law repeated the same horrible statement and then the phone was hung up.

Hired a lawyer to represent us and through the lawyer it was reported to DCF our concerns for the grandchildrens safety and well-being; and also reported the non stop verbal abuse to the grandchildren and sometimes physical abuse. DCF really had no concern: examples: we need pictures of bruises, we can't take reports just from grandparents-we need other people reporting this, drugs in home do not matter, lack of food in home does not matter, adult son's comment "I get so angry that I could kill someone' irrelevant, our daughter in laws non maternal instinct...example every time she is left alone with the children one of them is harmed .

No one was there to speak for or protect these two young pre-school age children.  
VERBAL/MENTAL ABUSE 'IS' AS SEVERE AS PHYSICAL ABUSE.....  
and DCF refuses to acknowledge this.

Thank you.

**Giannaros, Elizabeth**

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**From:** Susan Hoffman [bikc209@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Saturday, February 20, 2010 3:35 PM  
**To:** Giannaros, Elizabeth  
**Subject:** HB-5161

Dear Connecticut General Assembly,

On behalf of ADVOCATES FOR GRANDPARENT GRANDCHILD CONNECTION, a 501(c) (3), we support HB 5161, "An act requiring the training of the staff of the Department of Children and Families on grandparent visitation rights."

Those employed in the field of children's services must remain cognizant of a child's emotional welfare as well as physical. An important part of a child's development is maintaining close attachments with grandparents, with whom they have formed a bond.

The more staff that is involved with children, the more vital the training and education about a child's emotional needs. Grandparents, second only to a parent should be the likely next of kin notified about a child's transition into the system, and should remain involved in the process.

Sincerely,  
Susan Hoffman

Susan Hoffman  
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www.grandparentchildconnect.org