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Testimony of Erin Joudrey, Director of Foster Care & Adoption at Klingberg
Family Centers

Related to S.B. No. 844

AN ACT ADOPTING A FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children I thank you for your time and attention to the issues before you today. I am speaking to you today in support of Senate bill Number 844: An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights. I appreciate the opportunity you have provided to present testimony regarding this bill as it has the potential to positively affect the rights of foster parents in the State of Connecticut.

My name is Erin Joudrey and I am the Director of the Therapeutic Foster Care and Adoption Program at Klingberg Family Centers. Founded in 1903, Klingberg Family Centers is a private, nonprofit multi-service agency providing help to hundreds of persons across Connecticut each year. I am also speaking to you today as a member of Connecticut Association of Nonprofits and in that capacity I represent eighteen therapeutic foster care agencies, their foster families, and the children and youth they serve.

Over the past twelve years I have interacted with scores of foster parents, foster children, DCF personnel, and community providers in the provision of foster care to the children. In that time I have been honored to meet and work with individuals who understand deeply the importance of forging respectful and considerate relationships with foster parents. It has always been my experience that in these instances we see the best outcomes for foster children.

I have also had the unfortunate experience of bearing witness to the poor and inappropriate treatment of foster families. I have watched as children have been removed from foster homes with no explanation or preparation; have observed DCF make decisions about a child's permanency plan without consulting their foster parent; have heard from foster families that they are often dismissed and/or flatly ignored when they attempt to speak on their child's behalf; have routinely heard from Case Managers in my program that DCF Workers do not make their required monthly visit to the foster home and instead visit exclusively with the child/youth effectively dismissing the foster family; and have observed the projection of providers own biases and beliefs onto foster families disregarding that each family is unique and to be respected. Most recently, at a pre-meeting to match a youth in a Level II Group to one of our foster family's the Social Worker was so rude to the foster mother that the parent left the meeting crying.

These are just a few examples of the ways in which I have observed the poor treatment of foster parents. When we disregard foster parents we lose sight of what is truly in best interest of the child. I have seen time and time again how this type of treatment results in foster parent(s) to feeling angry, used, and disillusioned.

As you are all aware there is an urgent need to increase the number of foster parents in the State of Connecticut. Each and every foster family in the State of Connecticut is a valuable and precious resource that deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. The implementation of a Foster Parent Bill of Rights would serve to provide a common language and set of expectations regarding the treatment and inclusion of foster families. This has the potential to result in a foster care system that is more appealing to current and prospective foster parents therefore aiding in the recruitment and retention of foster families.

In closing I would ask for each of you to consider for a moment what it might be like to take a foster child into your home. To open up your life, your heart, and your family to a child in need. To throw that child a birthday party, to attend their parent teacher conferences, take them to karate class, and tuck them into bed at night. Would you not expect to be considered a valued and important member of that child's treatment team? How might it feel to be treated as inconsequential?

I implore you to please support the proposition of a Foster Parent Bill of Rights. I invite you to feel free to contact me if I can be of help in answering any questions. Additionally, I would be happy to gather a group of foster families to speak with you individually and/or as a group to discuss this bill and its importance.

Thank you for your consideration.