

February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

**Testimony of Chris Lacey, Program Director of Therapeutic Foster Care-  
Waterford Country School,  
Related to House Bill Number 6227:  
AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE GENERAL STATUTES  
CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.  
And  
Senate Bill Number 844:  
AN ACT ADOPTING A FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS.**

Representative Urban, Senator Musto, Representative Fawcett and other distinguished member of the committee thank you for your time and attention to the matters before you today. My name is Chris Lacey and I am the Program Director of the Waterford Country School's Therapeutic Foster Care Program. I am also a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits and the co-chair of its Foster Care Sector. Additionally, my wife and I have been foster parents with the Department of Children and Families for over 10 years in my hometown of Norwich.

Today, I voice support for House Bill Number 6227 AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE GENERAL STATUTES CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. Specifically the provisions related to kinship care. Knowing first hand how difficult it is to recruit and retain therapeutic foster parents, and having witnessed countless disruptions of children from foster placements, I am heartened to see increased attention to kinship care.

Private foster care agencies in Connecticut are already in the practice of licensing relatives as therapeutic foster parents so that they and the children in their care can receive the support they need. I know in my agency that this has led to many successful adoptions that might otherwise not have been possible. There will continue to be children who, because of their mental and/or behavioral health needs, need our support in order to be successful in any family. And we are committed to helping.

There are, however, some impediments to private agencies working with kin. There is no distinction in private foster care regulations between relatives and traditional non-relative parents. Therefore, we are required to have relatives complete our full pre-service training program which can take anywhere from 2-6 months. The first few months of any new placement are the most critical. Currently these children are either delayed in being placed or under serviced at the most critical time. The Department is able to approve a relative home in one day, and then complete the required training afterwards. I believe there is room for improvement in these regulations that will further strengthen the services available to kin with therapeutic needs. Specifically: 1. Change DCF policy to allow for immediate placement of relative children by private providers in

the same manner the Department. 2. Allow private providers the same immediate access to background check information that currently takes us months to obtain. 3. Amend current therapeutic contracts to allow for this practice.

Regarding Senate Bill Number 844, I also voice my support. As a DCF foster parent I think the respect and recognition for the work we do is long overdue and will be much appreciated. As the Director of a private agency foster care program I would suggest modifying the language in the Bill to also include the hundreds of foster parents approved by all private agencies. The language in the Bill currently seems to only apply to foster parents licensed by the Department of Children and Families.

In closing I ask that you look upon these bill requested changes favorably and that you give some consideration to the constraints mentioned above. Please feel free to contact me if I can answer any questions or be of any assistance to you.