



Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF

House Bill 6336

"An Act Concerning Kinship Care"

February 22, 2011

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University Of Connecticut School Of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

We strongly support **House Bill 6336** which will require the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to take steps to maximize kinship care rates for children in out-of-home care.

Connecticut's Kinship Care Rate Ranks 45% Below National Average

According to the most recent reports from the Connecticut *Juan F.* federal court monitor, of the abused and neglected children in DCF's care, only 13% are placed with relatives. This rate is far below the national average of 24%.¹ Significantly, **Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that requires a relative to complete requirements for licensure as a foster parent.**² It is time we recognize the benefits of kinship care placements, where appropriate, and take steps to ensure that DCF has all necessary tools to increase the state's kinship care rate.

Current Barriers to Kinship Care

In Connecticut, relatives must submit to the same licensing criteria as non-family members. Regulations currently provide that two pre-school cousins cannot share a room if they are of the opposite sex. Regulations mandate that a child over the age of one cannot share a room with his aunt or uncle or other adult family member, with express permission from the commissioner. Regulations state that cousins cannot share a room if they are of "disparate age."³

While these requirements may technically be "waived" by the Commissioner's office, in practice they operate as barriers to extended family members who seek to provide respite for children in DCF care. At the Center we have personally seen families disapproved of because the agency licensing unit disapproved of the family's sleeping arrangements. These stories are unfortunately, not uncommon. It is imperative that DCF review all of the current obstacles to improving the kinship care rate and ensure that onerous regulatory criteria do not serve as barriers to placing children in safe and nurturing relative homes.

Kinship Care Eases Trauma of Removal for Children

A child removed from her home by DCF, placed in a non-relative foster home, suffers not only the trauma of removal and separation (in addition to the conditions which led to her removal). She is placed in a stranger's home, where she may feel afraid, alone, and abandoned. Despite the generosity and dedication of the foster parent, the child's



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¹ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, THE AFCARS REPORT, available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.pdf

² CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY, PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH RELATIVES (Washington, D.C., July 2010), available at http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/placement.pdf

³ Reg. of Conn. State Agencies § 17-145-139

surroundings and the people she is dependent on for care are unfamiliar, not faces she's seen before, not people she trusts. These issues might be exasperated by the stigma of being in foster care, possible separation from siblings, and by not knowing if or when she will see her family again.

Kinship care for many children provides an alternative to the intense trauma of separation. **Kinship care gives children a sense of stability and continuity, connection with their family, cultural identity,** and a greater likelihood that they will be able to continue living with their siblings, among people they know and trust.

Research Indicates Kinship Care Promotes Stability for Children

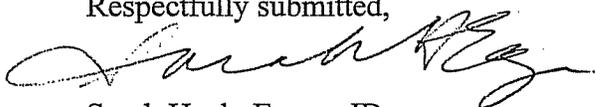
Children placed into kinship care have been shown to have fewer behavioral problems three years after placement than children who were placed into foster care.⁴ Children in foster care have been shown to have fewer placement changes,⁵ to be more likely to live with their siblings,⁶ and less likely to re-enter foster care after reunification.⁷

Fewer children in kinship care placements report having changed schools (63% vs. 93% for children in non-relative foster care)⁸, and children in kinship care have been shown to be more on target in their physical, cognitive and skill-based educational domains.⁹

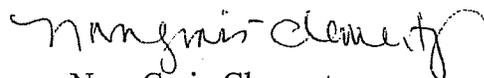
Children living in kinship care are less likely to report having tried to leave or run away,¹⁰ **and are more likely to report that they "always felt loved."**¹¹ Kinship care respects cultural traditions and may reduce racial disparities in a variety of outcomes.¹² These children are innocent victims when removed from their home and placed into DCF custody. When in the best interest of the child, kinship care placements should be our priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah Healy Eagan, JD
Director of the Child Abuse Project
Center for Children's Advocacy



Nora Grais-Clements
Law Student Intern, J.D.
Center for Children's Advocacy

⁴ Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. 2008; 162(6): 550-556. See also Tiffany Conway and Rutledge Q. Hutson, *Is Kinship Care Good for Kids?*, CLASP: CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY 1 (March 2, 2007), http://www.clasp.org/publications/is_kinship_care_good.pdf, citing National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) CPS Sample Component Wave 1 Data Analysis Report, April 2005. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, 2005).

⁵ CONWAY & HUTSON, *supra* note 6 at 1, citing Testa, M. 2001. *Kinship care and permanency*. Journal of Social Service Research, Vol. 28 (1) pp. 25-43.; Chamberlain, P., et al. 2006. *Who disrupts from placement in foster and kinship care?* Child Abuse & Neglect, Vol. 30, pp. 409-424.

⁶ *Id.*, citing Shlonsky, A., Webster D., & Needell, B. 2003. *The ties that bind: A cross-sectional analysis of siblings in foster care*. Journal of Social Service Research, Vol. 29 (3) pp. 27-52.; Wulczyn, F. & Zimmerman, E. 2005. *Sibling placements in longitudinal perspective*. Children and Youth Services Review, Vol. 27, p. 741-763.

⁷ *Id.*, citing Courtney, M. & Needell, B. "Outcomes of kinship care: Lessons from California." In *Child welfare research review*. Vol. 2. J.D. Berrick, R.P. Barth & N. Gilbert, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 130-149.

⁸ *Id.*, citing NSCAW 2005.

⁹ *Id.* at 2, citing NSCAW 2005.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 1, citing NSCAW 2005.

¹¹ *Id.*, citing Wilson, L. Satisfaction of 1,100 Children in Out-of-Home Care, Primarily Family Foster Care, in Illinois' Child Welfare System. Tallahassee, FL: Wilson Resources, 1996.

¹² *Id.* at 2.