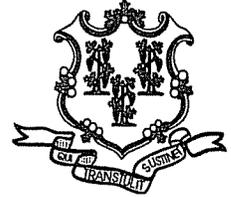




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



Public Hearing Testimony
Select Committee on Children
February 22, 2011

**S.B. No. 320 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN UNDER THE CARE OF
THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

The Department of Children and Families **supports the intent behind SB 320**, An Act Concerning Children under the Care of the Commissioner of Children and Families. This bill would require DCF staff to visit children in foster homes at least once every ten days and to visit children with behavioral health needs not later than thirty days after they are placed in the care and custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families.

Visitation standards for both out-of-home cases and in-home cases are a requirement of the *Juan F.* Exit Plan. Outcome Measure 16 requires DCF to visit at least 85% of all out-of-home children at least once a month, except for probate, interstate or voluntary cases. All children must be seen by their DCF social worker at least quarterly. For the most recent evaluation period (4th Quarter 2010), the Department met this measure 98.9% of the time. Outcome Measure 17 requires the Department to visit at least 85% of all in-home family cases at least twice a month, except for probate, interstate or voluntary cases. This measure was met 89.7% of the time during the most recent evaluation period (4th Quarter 2010).

The Department fully appreciates the benefits of increased visitation by our staff and is committed to making this a priority for our case-carrying, front-line staff.

**S.B. No. 322 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EMPLOYEES**

The Department of Children and Families is **opposed** to SB 322, An Act Concerning the Qualifications of Department of Children and Families Employees. This bill would require that each applicant for a Social Worker and Social Work Supervisor to possess, at a minimum, a master's degree in social work or a closely related field on and after January 1, 2012 and that on and after January 1, 2017, to require that all employees have such degrees. Further, the bill requires the individuals in these positions be licensed as a master or clinical social worker on and after January 1, 2020.

While we appreciate the intent behind this legislation, we would point out that for the Department only hires individuals into the Social Work career series with a minimum of a Bachelors Degree in Social Work or a closely-related field. In addition, a significant percentage of our staff already hold a Masters in Social Work or closely-related field. While we don't have updated information available at this time, a 2005 survey of revealed the following educational information for DCF social work staff.

**Connecticut Department of Children and Families
Social Worker Trainee / Social Worker / Social Work Supervisor
Educational Information (Highest Degree)**

Masters in Social Work	272
Bachelors in Social Work	125
Masters in Sociology	4
Masters in Psychology	18
Masters in Counseling	31
Masters in Human Services	4
Masters in Criminal Justice	2
Masters - Miscellaneous	38
Bachelors in Sociology	179
Bachelors in Psychology	169
Bachelors in Human Development and Family Relations	71
Bachelors in Social Science	22
Bachelors in Human Services	74
Bachelors in Criminal Justice	20
Bachelors - Miscellaneous	88
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Total	1,117

Note: Information from 2005 survey of DCF Social Work staff

The Department of Administrative Services, not DCF, develops the job specifications for all state positions and it should also be noted that both the Social Worker and Social Work Supervisor classes are bargaining unit positions. Any reclassification of these positions would be subject to the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

The chart below illustrates the career series progression and the job requirements for each of these positions.

SOCIAL WORK CAREER SERIES

SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR

Duties: Supervises social work staff in the provision of direct social case services to clients and provides case work quality improvement for assigned area.

Requirements: Possession of a Master's degree in social work or a closely related field and two (2) years of experience in the self directed use of case management techniques and counseling to sustain or restore client functioning OR a Bachelor's degree in social work or a closely related field and three (3) years of experience in the self directed use of case management techniques and counseling to sustain or restore client functioning OR a Bachelor's degree and four (4) years of experience in the self directed use of case management techniques and counseling to sustain or restore client functioning.



SOCIAL WORKER

Duties: Provides intensive supportive social case work services to an assigned case load of individuals and families.

Requirements: Undergraduate degree and two years' experience in autonomous case management techniques. MSW Degree may be substituted for the general experience. Candidates must pass the State Social Worker - Social and Human Services exam.

Career Progression: Candidates must meet the qualifications specified on the Social Work Supervisor job description, pass the Social Work Supervisor exam (coordinated by the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Children and Families), and be eligible for appointment from the resulting certification list for Social Work Supervisor before permanent appointment to that class can be made.



SOCIAL WORKER TRAINEE

Duties: Receives intensive training in the provision of social work service to individuals and families.

Requirements: Undergraduate degree in Social Work or related field.

Career progression: Candidates must successfully complete the two year training program as a Social Worker Trainee (or otherwise meet the qualifications for Social Worker) and pass the Social Work - Social and Human Services exam before permanent appointment

S.B. No. 323 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES REUNIFICATION PLANS

The Department of Children and Families is **opposed** to SB 323, An Act Concerning Department of Children and Families Reunification Plans. This bill would prohibit DCF from pursuing a plan to terminate parental rights when we are working on a plan to reunify the parent and child.

Federal Law provides states with the option of making reasonable efforts to make and finalize an alternate permanent placement concurrently with reasonable efforts to reunify a child with his/her family. We believe that concurrent planning is an effective tool for expediting permanency in some cases. Ultimately, the child's health, safety and well-being constitute the paramount concern in determining the extent to which reasonable efforts should be made.

S.B. No. 324 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING VACATIONS FOR FOSTER CHILDREN

The Department of Children and Families **supports the intent behind** SB 324, An Act Concerning Vacations for Foster Children, but believes that this can be accomplished through Department policy rather than statute.

DCF currently has a policy which requires foster parents to seek written permission from the Department before a foster child can travel out-of-state for overnight trips. This policy could be modified to require a reasonable timeframe for the Department to respond to a foster parents request for such travel.

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S.B. No. 980 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL STUDY FOSTER PARENTS

The Department of Children and Families has submitted SB 980, An Act Concerning Placement of Children with Special Study Foster Parents to the Select Committee on Children for your **favorable consideration** and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for raising this bill on our behalf.

This bill eliminates the age restriction for special study foster homes. Special Study Foster Homes are foster parents not related by birth or marriage but who have a significant and positive relationship with the child. Such individuals may include godparents, previous step-parents, clergy, close family friends, tribal members and others with an established relationship with the child. This will provide additional placement resources for children that are appropriate to and in the best interest of children.

DCF is required by the *Juan F. Exit Plan* to seek and attract more quality foster homes. The Department is committed to a strategy of conducting child-specific recruitment, in addition to our traditional efforts to attract new foster parents. We intend to actively seek more relative resources but also want to examine others with whom the child has an existing relationship.

S.B. No. 981 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN CONGREGATE CARE FACILITIES

The Department of Children and Families **supports the intent of** SB 981, An Act Concerning the Placement of Young Children in Congregate Care Facilities, but is concerned that the appropriate alternate resources need to be in place before we could implement this change. This bill would prohibit DCF from placing children under the age of six, or sibling groups with a child under the age of six, in congregate care facilities unless necessary for health reasons.

In most cases, congregate care is not appropriate for young children but there are examples of quality programs in Connecticut effectively serving a younger population. The Department is committed to working with the proponents of this legislation to ensure the needs of children in our care are appropriately addressed in an age-appropriate manner.

H.B. No. 6336 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING KINSHIP CARE

The Department of Children and Families **supports** HB 6336, An Act Concerning Kinship Care. This bill encourages the placement of children who are in the care of custody of DCF with relatives.

Similar to our support of SB 980, An Act Concerning Placement of Children with Special Study Foster Parents, this bill is consistent child-specific foster home recruitment. We are committed to increase the number of relative caregivers and we look forward to working with the Committee as this legislation moves forward.

**H.B. No. 6340 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN
IN OUT-OF-STATE TREATMENT FACILITIES**

The Department of Children and Families **supports** HB 6340, An Act Concerning the Placement of Children in Out-of-State Treatment Facilities. This legislation would require the return of children placed in out-of-state residential facilities by July 1, 2013, unless such placement is approved by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. It would also prohibit new placements out-of-state after April 1, 2013 unless a similar Court determination is made. The bill also requires a plan to reallocate funds and seek new funds to increase in-state, community-based services for children transitioning from out-of-state facilities. Also, the bill would require the Department to track race in its annual report regarding at-risk children.

Commissioner Katz is committed to a significant reduction in the number of children placed out-of-state. As of February 1, 2011, we had 357 children placed in out-of-state programs. The Department would request that the Committee modify the requirements of the legislation to recognize that some out-of-state placements are appropriate to the treatment needs of children and also some programs are in close proximity to child's town of residence. Currently 281 of these placements (79%) are in New England states.

We would suggest that this legislation be amended to provide alternative means of signing off on such placements rather than seeking a judicial determination, particularly since not all of the children have cases pending in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. Several years ago there was a practice of requiring formal sign off of each out-of-state placement by the Commissioner of DCF, the DCF Court Monitor and the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management. This process provided an effective check on out-of-state placements. While we're not suggesting the OPM Secretary be involved, perhaps the Committee could consider a similar structure in this legislation.

**H.B. No. 6352 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND MODIFICATIONS TO
STATUTES CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

The Department of Children and Families has submitted HB 6352, An Act Concerning the Membership of the Advisory Council on Children and Families and Modifications to Statutes Concerning the Department of Children and Families to the Select Committee on Children for your **favorable consideration** and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for raising this bill on our behalf.

This proposal repeals several obsolete reporting requirements and advisory boards and commissions and makes various modifications to DCF statutes.

Section 1 amends § 17a-4 to modify the composition of the State Advisory Council on Children and Families. The current statute needs clarification because it provides that "no less than fifty per cent of the council's members shall be parents or family members of children who have received, or are receiving" services from DCF, however the number of designated appointments of other members exceeds fifty per cent of the membership. This proposal resolves this conflict

by expanding the membership of the SAC by two members and also provides that foster parents should be included on the Council.

Section 2 repeals a planning requirement in § 17a-3 regarding youth at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School that dates back to the school's origins in 1998. The plan at that time was for longer length of stays for the youth at CJTS, but currently the average length of stay at CJTS is approximately 5 to 6 months. It should be noted that CJTS is part of the continuum of care and that the young men continue their treatment while in other residential programs and while in the community under Parole supervision.

Section 3 deletes a requirement for the adoption of regulations in § 17a-102a which relates to procedures for dealing with high-risk newborns in birthing hospitals. The Department had worked with the Connecticut Hospital Association in the development of regulations but both DCF and CHA believe that it makes more sense to require the dissemination of the information to the birthing hospitals rather than the promulgation of regulations and we request this change to this statute.