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Testimony

S.B. 981 AAC the Placement of Young Children in Congregate Care Facilities

Children's Committee

Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Dear Senator Markley, Senator Musto, Representative Urban, Representative Wood and members of the Children's Committee:

I am submitting testimony today on issues that concern me regarding S.B. 981.

These issues will greatly affect the children who can come to a facility such as Kids in Crisis, a state certified residential facility located in Cos Cob, CT, that serves children, teens and adults, needing emergency shelter. It is the only facility in the state that is licensed to take newborns.

My main concern with this proposed legislation is that it removes the ability from the professionals to make a decision on placement of a young child and puts that authority in the hands of the courts. At two in the morning, when DCF needs to remove a child from a home and if there is no relative or foster home immediately available, that child could be placed in a safe home, such as Kids in Crisis. Not only is the child safe, but Kids in Crisis has a full medical clinic on site and the child will receive a full evaluation within 24-48 hours, an evaluation that does not take place if the child is placed with a relative or in a foster home. If the child is medically fragile, he or she doesn't belong in a congregate home, he should be in a hospital.

Likewise, there have been instances when a new mother cannot take immediate care of her newborn. That infant could be placed at Kids in Crisis for a short stay until issues are stabilized at home. Kids in Crisis has responsible professionals on call 24/7 to take care of a baby under these circumstances.

My other concern with this proposed legislation is the placement of children who have a sibling under six who cannot be in congregate care. We all want children in the best environment available for them and young children should not remain in congregate care indefinitely. It is better to have these children safe and together in the same facility under professional supervision than in a place where none of the above is possible.

One section of the bill, which we agree with, is the section that states if a child is in congregate care for more than 30 days, the DCF Commissioner must petition the courts for an emergency family review. This will push DCF to find responsible foster placements for these children but in the meantime the child is safe and well cared for.

Shari Shapiro, the Director of Kids in Crisis, will be testifying before you today. DCF Commissioner Joette Katz visited Kids in Crisis two weeks ago. She wanted to have a look at the facility and to better understand the affects that legislation such as S.B. 981 would have on the young children. I believe she will also be offering testimony on this bill.

I understand the intent of the legislation, but I don't believe a one-size-fits-all is the way to resolve placement of young children through the court system. The unintended consequences of this bill could place a young child in a more difficult environment than the previous. I urge the committee to speak with the professionals who take care of these children, both at congregate care facilities and at DCF. I also urge you to improve this legislation so that a facility such as Kids in Crisis can continue to provide safe, short-term emergency shelter for all children, infants through high school.

Thank you for your time and attention on these very important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lile R. Gibbons". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lile Gibbons
State Representative
150th District