



Substitute Senate Bill No. 156

Public Act No. 12-71

AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 17a-10a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2014*):

(a) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall ensure that a child placed in the care and custody of the commissioner pursuant to an order of temporary custody or an order of commitment is provided visitation with such child's parents and siblings, unless otherwise ordered by the court.

(b) The commissioner shall ensure that such child's visits with his or her parents shall occur as frequently as reasonably possible, based upon consideration of the best interests of the child, including the age and developmental level of the child, and shall be sufficient in number and duration to ensure continuation of the relationship.

(c) If such child has an existing relationship with a sibling and is separated from such sibling as a result of intervention by the commissioner including, but not limited to, placement in a foster home or in the home of a relative, the commissioner shall, based upon

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consideration of the best interests of the child, ensure that such child has access to and visitation rights with such sibling throughout the duration of such placement. In determining the number, frequency and duration of [such] sibling visits, the commissioner shall consider the best interests of each sibling, given each child's age and developmental level and the continuation of the sibling relationship. If the child and his or her sibling both reside within the state and within fifty miles of each other, the commissioner shall, within available appropriations, ensure that such child's visits with his or her sibling occur, on average, not less than once per week, unless the commissioner finds that the frequency of such visitation is not in the best interests of each sibling.

(d) The commissioner shall include in each child's plan of treatment information relating to the factors considered in making visitation determinations pursuant to this section. If the commissioner determines that such visits are not in the best interests of the child, that the occurrence of, on average, not less than one visit per week with his or her sibling is not in the best interests of each sibling, or that the number, frequency or duration of the visits requested by the child's attorney or guardian ad litem is not in the best interests of the child, the commissioner shall include the reasons for such determination in the child's plan of treatment.

(e) On or before October first of each year, the commissioner shall report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children, data sufficient to demonstrate compliance with subsections (a), (c) and (d) of this section.

Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) For purposes of this section, "Youth Advisory Board" means a board established by each Department of Children and Families regional office that is comprised of youth in out-of-home care.

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(b) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall meet with the members of each Youth Advisory Board to gather recommendations for and to draft a "Sibling Bill of Rights", which may include, but not be limited to, ways to protect the relationships of siblings separated as a result of said commissioner's intervention and an affirmation by the department of its commitment to preserve the relationships between siblings who have been separated from each other while under department care. On or before October 1, 2013, the commissioner and members of the Youth Advisory Boards shall submit the Sibling Bill of Rights to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children for consideration of possible legislative action.

(c) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall incorporate the final version of the Sibling Bill of Rights into department policy and share such policy with each child placed in the care and custody of the commissioner pursuant to an order of temporary custody or an order of commitment.