

Testimony for Public Hearing
Select Committee on Children
Feb. 28, 2012

Margaret Doud
20 Village Ct.
Wilton, CT 06897

H.B. 5168 "An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights"
(written-only testimony)

I have been a foster parent for two years, and the frustrations I have faced in the process of advocating for my foster children have motivated me to testify today in support of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

The challenges DCF faces in the area of foster parent retention are well documented, as are the far reaching effects this has on the foster care system as a whole. In my experience, and those of many other foster parents I have spoken with, consistent frustrations that contribute to this problem have to do with the lack of support foster parents receive when trying to secure services that our foster children are entitled to. This issue, as I see it, is two-fold:

- 1) Foster parents aren't told what these services are. Usually they are discovered incidentally in conversations with other foster parents. In my case these "secret" services included:
 - a) The right to get free lunch at school. (I made my foster daughter lunch or bought her hot lunch every day for one year before finding out she was entitled to free lunch.)

b) The right to request that a tutor be provided for my foster daughter to address her extensive learning disabilities. (It took me six months of battling with the social worker and the supervisor to secure a tutor for her even after I discovered this was something she was entitled to.)

c) The right of my foster daughter to live with her biological brother in my home. This was something both children were asking to be able to do, and I was more than happy to support this request. It took extensive research on my part, however, including reading DCF policy and the stipulations of the Juan F. v Rell class action suit, to determine what their rights actually were. Once I ascertained that this right was clearly supported by DCF policy as well as federal oversight stipulations I wrote repeatedly to the children's social workers, supervisors, Guardian ad litem and lawyer, but to no avail. I couldn't even get any of them to answer my e-mails when I outlined all of the policies that were in place to support this request. In desperation, I finally turned to the Ombudsman's office for help. The children were together within one week of my contacting that office, but unfortunately it had taken 11 months to uncover all of this information and secure a resolution to this issue.

2) In the process of advocating for all of the above, the case supervisor got to the point where she would stonewall me and would give me attitude at every request.

When I had been dealing with this problem for about six months I called to ask that DCF take over transporting my foster daughter to her weekly therapy appointment. (It is their responsibility to transport to medical appointments). The nasty retort I received from the supervisor was, "Well, Ms. Doud, if you aren't transporting your foster child to her

medical appointments what *are* you doing as her foster parent?"

I assure you I could have filled many pages with all that I was doing for this child. This response was one of several such demoralizing interactions with DCF that were clearly rooted in the supervisor's annoyance with having to deal with the advocating that I was doing on behalf of my foster child.

The Foster Parent Bill of Rights addresses these concerns as well as many other issues regularly raised by foster parents who have already, or are seriously considering, not renewing their license. Your vote in support of this bill will go a long way toward increasing foster parent retention and, as a result, strengthening the foster care system as a whole.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this serious problem.

Sincerely,
Margaret M. Doud