

**Testimony Supporting: S.B. 156: An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation
for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families**

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Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban, and distinguished of the Select Committee on Children:

Among children in care, separation from siblings is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and anger symptoms.¹ It is also associated with greater likelihood of placement and adoption disruption.² Maintaining connections with siblings and other family members can be a crucial resource for older children as they transition to independence,³ and it is an important factor in promoting resilience in maltreated children.⁴

The Juan F. Exit Plan requires that "at least 95% of the siblings entering out-of-home placement shall be placed together unless there are documented therapeutic reasons for separate placements." This is a standard that has consistently not been met, with approximately 15% of the children entering out-of-home care separated from siblings at time of initial placement. In our prior longitudinal studies of children in DCF care, we found the proportion of children separated from siblings increased significantly with subsequent placements and longer time in care.

DCF does not systematically track information about sibling visitation. A small case review conducted during the last federal Children & Family Service Review revealed that, while one-third of the cases reviewed had sibling visitation at least weekly, the majority had visitation less than twice a month, and one-third had no visitation with their siblings at all during the time period under review.

Given the importance of sibling relationships for the well being of children in care, I lend my support for S.B. 156. Improved data management is required to know the proportion of all children in care living with or separated from siblings, and the frequency of contact among siblings that are separated. The proposed standard of weekly visitation, with allowable modifications under extenuating circumstances, is reasonable and in the best interest of the child.

References

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4. Kaufman J. Child Abuse. *Lewis' Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: A Comprehensive Textbook.* Fourth Edition ed. Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2007.