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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 28, 2012**

RAISED BILL 5186, AN ACT ADOPTING A FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

The Office of Chief Public Defender endorses the idea that foster parents are an integral part of the child welfare system and have the right to be respected and to receive support and information regarding the children in their care. The Office of Chief Public Defender is concerned that portions of **Raised Bill 5186, An Act Adopting a Foster Parent Bill of Rights**, could potentially hamper both the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the court system from moving towards a speedy, permanent resolution of child welfare cases. As DCF continues to work towards having more children placed with extended family or other relatives, they need to have flexibility make placement changes in the best interest of the child. While it would almost always be preferable for DCF to get input from foster parents regarding a child placement, a statutory requirement to do so could hinder the Department's ability to quickly move children into permanent homes. A statutory requirement that foster parents be notified of hearings, case reviews and meetings risks having proceedings delayed and important federal permanency deadlines missed, if notice requirements are missed or contested. The Office of Chief Public Defender urges this Committee to work with DCF to encourage policies that develop respect and communication with foster parents, but to act cautiously before imposing more statutory mandates.