

Testimony for Public Hearing
Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2012

Christine Surel
20 Wilson Street
Milford, CT 06461

Raised Bill No. 5186 - AN ACT ADOPTING A FOSTER PARENTS BILL OF RIGHTS

Good Afternoon Madame Chair Urban, Madame Chair Gerratana and Select Committee Members. My name is Christine Surel and I am a Parent Leader and Foster parent.

I believe to ensure positive outcomes in the child welfare system it is dependent not only on services provided to biological parents and their children but also on services provided to foster parents.

There are over 3000 foster care providers in the State of Connecticut. The youth we serve have disproportionately high rates of trauma experience and mental health problems compared to the general public. Engaging the foster parents is especially important to achieve the maximum benefit for children in out of home care. The goal of foster parents is to be viewed as a valuable team member of the child welfare system specifically in regards to the children placed in our care. Foster parents spend more time with the children than anyone else on that child's team. Biological parents, Social Workers and service providers typically spend an hour or two a week in the child's company. It is the foster parents who are truly the front line workers who support and reinforce the children's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. As well as teach and reinforce the children's use of coping skills when faced with their new environments, uncertainty about their future, the court system and visits with biological family which can be joyous and anxiety producing for the child.

Foster care is one of many important components to the child welfare system and as with any large system there are good and not so good components. I am hoping that a bill of rights will build a stronger working relationship with DCF focused on engaging foster parents and in doing so, creating mutual respect, transparency and value of all team members serving the youth in foster care.

There have been a lot of positive changes under the direction of Commissioner Katz; however DCF policy can be interpreted differently from Office to Office and Social Worker to Social Worker. Unfortunately policy changes and new initiative implementation sometimes take years to filter through the system and become common Social Worker practice. We are asking for your help so our rights are acknowledged across the board.

The training required for foster parent licensure is ten (10) three (3) hour classes. Those classes are condensed down to a single nine (9) hour class for relatives and special study foster parents generally taking place many weeks after the children have already been placed in the home. Therefore providing a copy of the rights of foster parents at time of placement with the current push to place children with relatives is necessary. It will re-enforce that foster parents have certain rights. The Department has a 2003 resource manual that is supposed to be provided to foster parents after licensure but generally it is not received. DCF had begun to update the now titled foster parent/adoptive manual and make it accessible to the public on their webpage but as of July of 2010 it remains incomplete. I need your help! I want a foster parent's bill of rights. I think it is important to advocate for the children we serve with out fear of retaliation and with complete knowledge and understanding of our rights as foster parents. I am hopeful this bill will enhance the services we deliver to our states most vulnerable citizens, the children we accept if only temporarily as valuable members of our family.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Christine Surel (203) 305-8400