

Dear Committee,

I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to speak and testimony in support of the H.B. 5224.

My name is Fatu Sheriff and I am senior social work student at Southern Connecticut State University expecting to graduate with my bachelor's degree in social work this May.

According to the DCF, Connecticut has over 113, 000 foster children living with their grandparents or other relative. The grandparents and other relatives are the primary caregivers ("kinship caregivers") for those foster children whose parents cannot or will not care for them due to substance abuse, illness and death, abuse and neglect, economic hardship, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, and other family and community crises. During my freshman year at American School for the Deaf in West Hartford Connecticut, I worked as RN student supervisor in the Cogswell Dorm -I woke up residential elementary school aged students (including those with multiple disabilities) in the morning, prepared them for school, and accompanied them to breakfast as a supervisor. There was this one deaf girl who lost her mother to gun violence and she and her twin sister were supposedly to be put into the Connecticut Foster Care system. Although the grandmother decided to become the primary caregiver to her granddaughter purpose to keep the sisters together and provide them with permanent home; the grandmother struggled to support the girls financial because her salary was only enough to pay for the bills and so little for other. Fortunately, because one of the twins is deaf – the grandmother was able to received monthly Supplemental Security Income Benefit (SSI) to provide necessities for her granddaughters.

I here by testimony in support of the H.B. 5224 because it is the most important step forward to improving the well-being of the Connecticut's foster children living with grandparents or other relation and offering these vulnerable children meaningful family connections. I acknowledge the perspectives of these who opposite H.B. 5224, however, I do not think that they understand how the increasing public assistance to grandparents and other relatives raising children will benefit the wellbeing of these foster children.

In this economic environment it is simply unrealistic to limit public assistance to grandparents or other relatives raising children simply because they are relatives to the children. The purpose for increasing public assistance to grandparents and other relatives raising children is to enhance the well being of the children, not the grandparents or the other relatives.

As a social wok student who will soon be the voice these foster children and a citizen who has witnessed a poor grandmother struggled to provide for her granddaughter; I ask you the committee to vote the H.B. 5224 favorably out of the committee for sake of the children.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to speak and testimony in support of the H.B. 5224.

Sincerely,
Fatu Sheriff
Social Work Student at Southern Connecticut State University