

**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINA COKE IN SUPPORT OF SECTIONS 8 AND
9 OF RAISED BILL NO. 155**

My name is Christina and I am a resident of Bridgeport, Connecticut. **I am here in support of sections 8 and 9 of Raised Bill No. 155.**

I was born in Jamaica. When I was less than a month old, my mother could no longer care for me and sent me to live with relatives. Over the next few years I lived with several different families. I only met my father once when I was 12 years old and he died soon after I met him.

By the time I was nine years old one of the families that had taken me into their home brought me back to my mother because they could no longer care for me. Unfortunately my mother was also unable to care for me at that time. With no place to go, one of my teachers at school brought me to her home and offered me a place to stay. A few months later, my teacher's niece, Charmaine, who lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut learned about my life in Jamaica and offered to provide me with a loving and permanent home.

Over the next few years she took care of my basic needs and visited me often along with her daughters. She also started the process to bring me along to live permanently in the United States. In the meantime my mother gave up her parental rights over me. Unfortunately, the process took far too long and by the time I turned 16 Charmaine could no longer petition me as an adopted child. By

this time, I was staying with her in Bridgeport and had no place to return to in Jamaica.

As a result I was a child with no legal parents. With the help of a lawyer from the Center for Children's Advocacy, I was able to have Charmaine appointed as my legal guardian. Now I have a permanent home. My lawyer also made a petition to the Probate Court to make special findings which have allowed me to apply for lawful permanent residence in the United States so that I can stay with my family. After graduating with Honors from Harding High School I started attending college and hope to become a physician in the future.

I support sections 8 and 9 of Raised Bill No. 155, because I believe that it will allow other children and youth like me to not just have the ability to find their permanent family but also be able to stay with them forever.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Christina Coke