

Center for Children's Advocacy

TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE STUDY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AS THEY RELATE TO PREPARATION OF YOUTHS AGING OUT OF STATE CARE, HB 5374

Committee on Program Review and Investigations
March 4, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino, and committee members. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. Through our work with youth aging out of the foster care system, the Center has talked with youth who have aged out of the child welfare system with little guidance, without financial security, and even without a place to stay. Youth aging out of the foster care system are the most at-risk and in need of assistance and the Department of Children and Families is lacking in providing services to those who need it the most- those who cannot comply with the eligibility requirements currently set by the Department.

On behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, I urge you to approve HB 5374. This bill seeks a commitment from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to those youth who are most at-risk pursuant to recent findings and recommendations contained in the 2014 Legislative Program Review and Investigations report. The report examined the services provided by DCF to youth aging out of state care. The Committee noted, however, that a comprehensive assessment of these services and the Department's preparation of youth aging out of foster care was virtually impossible to piece together. This was due to DCF's lack of quality data on their programs and on individual youth outcomes. Without this information, the Committee could not properly assess the Department's services, and the Department could not be held accountable to the youth it was meant to assist in this capacity. In addition, by not tracking this type of information, DCF itself could not determine whether its programs were, in fact, helping aging out youth at all; it could also not intervene in individual situations where such a youth may have been failing to adapt to a new setting outside of DCF's care, as it could not provide the Committee with any individual outcomes. Despite this, the Committee recommended several areas in which DCF could improve their services to aging out youth, including permanency, housing, education, employment, health care, life skills, re-entry, targeted services, youth empowerment, and data collection.

HB 5374 would require DCF to submit progress reports on the steps they have taken in order to comply with these recommendations. The deadline for this progress report, as stated in the bill, is February 2, 2015. This added measure would hold DCF accountable for compliance with the PRI recommendations. This is vitally important to the implementation of such recommendations, as it will ensure that progress is being made. The progress reports will keep the Department on track, as they will have to submit the report to Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee and the joint standing committees of the General Assembly. These committees will have a basis to determine whether or not the DCF's work is satisfactorily helping to ensure that youth aging out of care are better equipped for self-sufficiency. As the recommendations are essential to the protection of the youth under DCF's care, it is important to ensure that the Department is implementing them within a timely fashion.

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These progress reports will greatly bolster the execution of the PRI's recommendations and thus provide greater protection to at-risk youth.

For these above reasons, the Center for Children's Advocacy urges the Committee to support HB 5374. Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

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