



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony

Government Administration & Elections Committee

February 25, 2015



PROPOSED H.B. No. 5793 AN ACT ESTABLISHING SAFE HAVEN DAY

The Department of Children and Families **supports** Proposed H.B. No. 5793, An Act Establishing Safe Haven Day. This bill would designate April 2nd each year as "Safe Haven Day" in Connecticut.

The Safe Haven Act, enacted in 2000, protects parents from being prosecuted for abandonment and ensures the baby will be safe and receive adequate care while a permanent family is found. DCF believes that it is very important that we take every opportunity to raise awareness of the existence of the law and designating a day each year will be beneficial in that regard.

Department records show 24 instances in which a baby has been brought to a hospital emergency department under the Safe Haven law since it became effective in Connecticut on October 1, 2000. The law was enacted to prevent the abandonment of infants, which can have deadly consequences. Since the law took effect, four babies were determined to have been abandoned, with the last being in Groton in 2006. Fortunately, all four babies survived. In August 2014, East Hartford police announced an investigation for possible abandonment of an infant who was found dead. On October 16, 2014 East Hartford Police charged the mother of the infant with first-degree manslaughter, first-degree assault, risk of injury to a minor and concealment of delivery.

In 2014, there were four Safe Haven babies. Two babies were brought to Midstate Medical Center, the others were brought to Day Kimball Hospital and St. Francis Hospital. In 2013, babies were brought to Lawrence and Memorial Hospital and Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. Each of the previous Safe Haven babies has been placed into a permanent home, either with a family already licensed by the Department or with a relative.

The Department has seen a heightened interest in adoption when a Safe Haven baby comes to its attention, and it is common for people to contact the Department about adopting the baby. When a parent invokes the Safe Haven law, the Department quickly starts the process to terminate parental rights and to identify a family who is already licensed by the Department who wants to adopt. The goal is to establish permanency as quickly as possible.

While only currently licensed families are considered for a Safe Haven babies, people should nevertheless take this opportunity to learn about foster care and adoption. People who want to learn more about becoming an adoptive or foster parent can call 1-888-KID-HERO or go to www.ctfosteradopt.com.

How the Safe Havens Law Works

- Infants 30 days old or younger can be left at a Safe Haven (any hospital emergency department)
- The parent will be given a packet about the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and DCF will assume custody of the infant
- Parental rights will be terminated so that the baby can be adopted
- If the parent changes his or her mind, he or she should contact DCF and immediately apply to the court for representation by an attorney
- Parents who do not harm their infant cannot be criminally charged with abandonment if they use a Safe Haven
- A nurse will meet the parent in a private room to obtain medical history, but the parent does not have to answer any questions

Additional information regarding the Safe Havens law is available on the DCF website - <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2534&Q=555820>