

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1007
An Act Concerning Permanency Placements

By Julian Ford, Ph.D., A.B.P.P.

March 3, 2015

To members of the Children's Committee:

My name is Julian Ford and I am a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Graduate School and the Director of the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice at the University of Connecticut Health Center. I submit this testimony in support of SB 1007, *An Act Concerning Permanency Placements*. Specifically, I would like to comment on **sections O-S** of the raised bill which provide an avenue for children who are in the custody and care of the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) to maintain sibling contact after adoption. I support this important legislation for the following reasons:

1. Maintaining sibling relationships post-adoption is critically important from a clinical perspective to children who have been removed from a home during the child welfare process. Even when children are separated by DCF and placed in separate foster homes, visitation and contact with their siblings always should be provided (by law) because this contact often is the only remaining link to their original family. The ability to maintain this sibling contact after the children are adopted by different families increases their ability to maintain the primary emotional bonds that every child needs with their original family in order to develop a strong emotional bond with their adoptive family without feeling that they have been disloyal to or been rejected by their original family.
2. Legal statutes support the present foster-care requirement that DCF must ensure sibling visitation wherever practical. The proposed legislation is a logical extension of this premise for children who are permanently separated due to the adoption process. If there is a way to guarantee that the same premise (ensuring sibling bonds and a sense of not "losing" their original family) that is legally required for kids in foster care is also available for kids in post-adoption situations, that would be greatly beneficial for the emotional well-being of these most vulnerable children and also is likely to increase their capacity to become emotionally invested in their adoptive family. Rather than pulling kids back into their original family, sibling visitation enables them to retain that connection while also emotionally bonding with their adoptive family without being held back by a sense of disloyalty.
3. Consistency of relationships. From a psychological standpoint, many (if not most) children who are adopted do not want to have to choose between their original and adoptive families. When the decision is made to terminate parental rights, then their sibling relationships often are their only remaining connection to their original family. When they are separated by the child welfare agency - they have to rely on the one thing that bonds all of them ... their former lives in a family unit. From a clinical perspective, this is essential to preserve ... because until these kids are older, they won't have any access to their biological parents, but they usually can have access to their siblings. Why wouldn't we do everything we can to foster this connection until these kids

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become adults? It is in their best interests both developmentally and for their ability to forge bonds with their new family.

Respectfully submitted,

Julian D. Ford /S/

Julian D. Ford, Ph.D., A.B.P.P.
Professor
Department of Psychiatry and Graduate School
Director, Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice
University of Connecticut Health Center MC1410
263 Farmington Ave.
Farmington, CT 06030
860-679-8778
jford@uchc.edu