

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law, 65 Elizabeth Street, Hartford, CT 06105

Testimony of the Center for Children's Advocacy in Support of Raised H.B. 6899: An Act Expanding Guardianship Opportunities for Children and Implementing Provisions of the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Section 1

Committee on Children

March 3, 2015

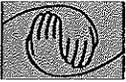
Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, Senator Martin, Representative Kokoruda, and Distinguished Members of the Children's Committee:

My name is Dave Woods and I am testifying on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a public-interest law firm representing Connecticut's most at-risk youth. The Center supports raised bill 6899 generally and, in particular, Section 1, which is new language that adopts a reasonable and prudent parent standard for foster parents.

Adopting a reasonable and prudent parent standard will bring Connecticut in line with other leading states in ensuring that foster parents are empowered to make decisions for the children in their care and that foster children are free to experience rich, fulfilling lives while in state care.

Connecticut has rigorous statutory and policy mandates ensuring that only the right people become foster parents. Foster parents must become licensed before children are turned over to their care, and this process is thorough.ⁱ

- Before licensing, DCF assesses not only the proposed foster parents, but also any person "who lives in or has regular and consistent access to a foster home, or otherwise participates as a member of the family system."ⁱⁱ
- Applicants, along with all their household members, must submit to multiple criminal background checks before licensure, and licenses are denied or revoked whenever allegations of child abuse or neglect are substantiated against potential foster parents.ⁱⁱⁱ



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But these well-chosen foster parents are currently denied the ability to make common-sense decisions for the children they care for without a reasonable and prudent parent standard in place.

- Foster parents can only allow persons "approved in advance by the commissioner" to take care of their foster kids for "substantial amount[s] of time."^{iv}
- Logistically and practically, it is impossible for foster parents to anticipate and get DCF approval for every responsible adult who might assist in children's supervision.

When foster parents can't act like parents, foster children don't get treated like children. The approval-in-advance standard means foster parents can't let their kids attend sleepover parties, visit summer camps, or participate in travel opportunities, even though these activities are a regular part of the lives of their foster kids' peers throughout the state.

- Foster children must cope with new families, new homes in new towns, new schools and rules when they are placed by DCF. Imbibing foster kids with a sense of normalcy should therefore be our utmost goal.
- Further ostracizing foster children by preventing them from participating in extracurricular and enrichment activities only makes their lives harder while simultaneously undermining the foster parents our state has already approved.

Other states have already recognized the problem and adopted this logical solution. The reasonable and prudent parent standard is now law in a number of forward-thinking jurisdictions, and Connecticut needs to join them.

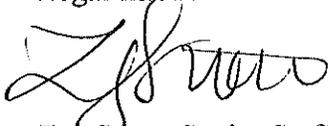
- California authorizes foster parents to make reasonable judgments about babysitting, social activities with friends and family, and extracurricular opportunities such as athletics and church attendance.^v
- Washington State cast a prudent parenting standard into law after “current and former foster youth indicated their experience . . . would have been much more normal if their caregivers had been allowed to decide what activities they [could have] participate[d] in, rather than waiting for their social worker to approve the activity.”^{vi}
- Florida passed its “Let Kids Be Kids” prudent parent law in 2013 to “promote normalcy for each child to the fullest extent possible.” This law allows Florida’s foster youth to “go[] to the beach with friends” just like the regular kids they are and should be.^{vii}

Connecticut takes pains to ensure only qualified individuals become foster parents, and raised bill 6899, Section 1 ensures that foster parents make decisions only with their foster children’s ages, needs, and well-being foremost in mind. Given those protections, enabling foster children to live more normal lives is an important step in promoting the best interests of the children in the foster care system. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully submitted,



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Zoe Stout, Senior Staff Attorney
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NOTES

- ⁱ *How to Become an Adoptive Parent, Foster Parent, or Relative Caregiver*, CONN. DEPT. OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (2015), <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2561&q=314316>.
- ⁱⁱ CONN. AGENCIES REGS. §§ 17a-114-27–28, *available at* <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=492008>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ CONN. AGENCIES REGS. §§ 17a-114-46, *available at* <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=492008>.
- ^{iv} CONN. AGENCIES REGS. § 17a-114-42, *available at* <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=492008>.
- ^v *All County Information Notice No. 1-17-13: Questions and Answers (Q & A) Regarding Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards*, CAL. DEPT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES (May 17, 2013), HTTP://WWW.DSS.CAHWNET.GOV/LETTERSNOTICES/ENTRES/GETINFO/ACIN/2013/I-17_13.PDF.
- ^{vi} Mike Canfield, *Legislature Passes Senate Bill 6497*, FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON STATE (FPAWS), <http://www.fpaws.org/content/children's-administration-and-“prudent-parenting”-law>.
- ^{vii} *Let Kids Be Kids Law*, FLORIDA DEPT. OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (2014), <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/let-kids-be-kids-law>.