



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
HOUSE BILL 7042: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN BY
THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Judiciary Committee
March 30, 2015

Submitted by Rory Noone

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Rory Noone and I am here to testify in support of HB 7042, “An Act Concerning the Placement of Children by the Commissioner of Children and Families.” I am a trans/queer youth organizer with the LGBTQ* Youth Kickback (“Kickback”), a queer youth organization in New Haven that is committed to challenging oppression in our communities. Often, that oppression comes from positions of concentrated power, such as the DCF’s commissioner’s position.

Kickback is a youth-led grassroots organization based in downtown New Haven. Kickback prioritizes, creates and expands safety, self-discovery, and leadership for queer youth every day through strong interpersonal connections and every week by developing youth-led educational workshops –normally attended by about 30+ young people -- based around issues we identify as important to the LGBTQ* community. Our workshops examine the intersections and axes of oppression and promote critical awareness as well as inspire and enable young people to create change and deconstruct power in their communities and on a city and state-wide level. In addition to weekly workshops every Monday, Kickback has created and led a trans literacy campaign that has educated and informed New Haven public high school students and faculty. We have achieved visibility on a municipal level and built sustained relationships with public officials, including Jason Bartlett, Director of Youth Services for the City of New Haven, as well as with other community organizations. Kickback provides a platform that centers youth experiences that are otherwise erased, underrepresented or invalidated, thereby building a community that would not otherwise exist. This diversity of perspectives allows us to address the ways in which structural and systemic injustices in our laws and society can affect people that may not fit the mainstream narrative.

If we as the state of Connecticut are going to tackle huge issues like racism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty, we have to make sure that the people whom the laws are affecting have the opportunity to speak out. It is especially important to

advocate for people whose voices often go unheard and are too often marginalized and largely unprotected institutionally. We value the power in our personal narratives and interpersonal dialogue, and see and experience how the laws in Connecticut affect real people like ourselves. As leaders of our state, we count on our state policy-makers to advocate and represent our needs and perspectives. Connecticut has been at the forefront of the fight for trans rights and the rights of other historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, but together we can and must do more to enforce and protect those rights on the ground. It is imperative that our state leaders listen to youth who have experienced these oppressions and are working to eradicate the systemic barriers to success that all too many people in Connecticut face. We are those youth.

Under this current statute, the power to make decisions about minors' environments does not reside with them. It resides with someone who is removed from the consequences of such transfers, reinforcing oppression based on race, gender and sexuality. Thus, it is necessary to change this statute in order to create accountability within the institution of DCF.

I have never been in the custody of DCF or the Department of Corrections, but trans/queerphobia outside of those institutions is a tangible part of my life. My physical safety is often precarious because of this. About a year ago, I was in the CT Juvenile Justice System. I wasn't in the DOC or DCF, but I was/am an out trans person. Court officials often misgendered me and I felt pressured to present myself in a certain way for fear or being punished for my identity and for fear of receiving a harsher sentence. I got off lightly, but I was close to landing in DCF for eighteen months. The disrespect and erasure of my identity I experienced in court would have been amplified and my physical safety been made even more precarious had I ended up in DCF.

Trans people are often targeted for violence based on our identities and presentations. However, the narrative of this violence, if it is even told at all, is one of interpersonal physical violence, such as murder and/or assault. The violence that is often less visible, but no less harmful, happens on structural and state levels, for instance laws that can be used to marginalize trans youth in state custody, such as statute 17a-12 as it currently reads. Changing this statute is necessary in order not only to protect the lives of trans youth in CT, but also the communities that we belong to.

Myself and many others in this room are committed to creating a world that is not founded on violent systems that oppress people, such as racism and transphobia. Too often, we find ourselves on the receiving end of verbal and physical threats, which are the immediate results of those systems. We have no other choice but to fight back and create communities that sustain us. As leaders of our state, you have a responsibility to defend our communities, especially when we come into spaces that do not traditionally represent them and allow ourselves to be honest and vulnerable within them.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.