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Testimony in Support of
House Bill No. 5290 AN ACT INCREASING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER
NONPARENT RELATIVES WHO ARE RAISING CHILDREN

Good morning Senator Flexer, Representative Serra and members of the Aging Committee. My name is Susan Collins and I'm a resident of Windham, Connecticut. I'm here today to testify in support of House Bill 5290, AN ACT INCREASING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER NONPARENT RELATIVES WHO ARE RAISING CHILDREN.

After successfully raising 8 children, I have found myself in a situation I never would have expected. I am raising 3 of my grandchildren with very little support I can count on from their parents and the state. I have raised them since they were young and now Jullian is 18, Kayden 15 and Chase 9. I have been raising grandchildren for the last 15 years and will continue for many more years. I have raised them as a single grandparent.

There was no question that when I was asked to take guardianship of my grandchildren that I would do it despite the fact that many of my friends and relatives suggested I do not. It is a struggle.

I am 66 years old and have a full time job. Because I am raising my grandchildren I know that retirement is not a possibility for a while.

There is no question that most children who would otherwise be in the foster system are better off if they are placed with family. However, because grandparents do not have the same financial assistance that foster care parents it is a struggle making ends meet. My child support for both Jullian and Kayden has been \$350 total a month. Not enough for food, clothing our housing let alone what most other children have. Needless to say, I financially take care of their needs. My grandchildren are doing well, I have just sent my 1st grandchild off to college on scholarships and of course continue to pay for his books and late night pizza's. I have paid for their soccer camps, and school trips so they do not have to feel different from other children. But I worry every month how to pay the bills and provide them with the loving, caring home and quality of life they deserve. Most children who are not living with their parents also need some counseling to help them with the issues related to their parents.

Grandparents should have the same financial assistance as do foster parents. I am sure by the mere fact that we have agreed to put our lives on hold to raise our grandchildren is in fact saving the state money. It will become harder for grandparents to say yes to take on the responsibility both financially and emotionally without more help from the state.

Grandparents are committed to doing what is best for their grandchildren and have the same roles and responsibilities as foster parents. It is much better for most children who are in need of care be with relatives who have a connection and a sense of commitment to their grandchildren, but so many are not

financially able to do so. So many grandparents are not as fortunate as I am to be employed at a place that is understanding and flexible to the needs of a grandparent who is raising their grandchildren. The amount of personal time one needs to take to pick a child up from school for an appointment, or stay at home with a sick child, or to make sure you are there for them when they are playing a soccer game or the saxophone in a concert.

As an example, when Jullian came to me at 3 he had 13 cavities that needed to be addressed. At that time there was no pediatric dentist in our community that took Husky. I needed to put him on my dental insurance which I had to pay extra for.

Because of them I have continued to stay active in their schools. I am the chair of the School Governance at the high school, I am vice Chair of the Windham High School Booster Club. I also chair the School Readiness Council and the School Based Health Center in our schools.

The boys all play sports, three or four evenings a week I drive them to soccer or basketball practice. Mostly every night we have family dinners, with home cooked meals, I go to every parent teacher conferences, and although I must admit it is harder to sit in those little chairs. They know they are loved and safe with me as I am sure that most children who are being cared for by their grandparents feel.

I am asking that you please consider making our lives a bit easier by supporting us financially at the same level as foster parents are.

I am hoping to attend and to testify but I am anxiously awaiting my 13th grandchild to be born and might be heading to Boston to meet him.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Susan Collins