

Testimony Regarding:
S.B. 180: An Act Concerning Permanency Hearings,
Youth Advisory Councils and Foster Families

Ronaele T. Williams
Committee on Children
February 23, 2016

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Ronaele T. Williams, and I am here to testify in support of S.B. 180, An Act Concerning Permanency Hearings, Youth Advisory Councils and Foster Families.

I am 19, going on 20. I've been in Foster Care since I was 16. In that time, I have been in 4 permanency homes and multiple respite placements. I graduated from New Haven Academy High School, and am now a freshman in college. I am a member of New Haven's Department of Children and Families (DCF) Youth Advisory Board (YAB).

I am here to advocate on the behalf of fellow youth in foster care regarding S.B. 180. This bill would require DCF to provide transportation to permanency hearings for youth 12 and over. In my own experience, permanency hearings, which help determine the order of our lives, have largely happened over a phone conference. Sometimes, I was not even notified in advance. My hearings consisted mainly of my social workers, someone of higher authority, foster parents, a therapist if I had one, and me (that's if I knew about it in advance, chose to participate, and was able to make it). In these phone conferences, the person of higher authority initiates the conversation and explains what we are here for and then the rest are free to talk about what has been occurring with the youth, everyone's role with the youth, what they think is best for the youth and what they want, whether it was advocated for or not for by the youth, and any additional comments or questions. The end result of this conversation is just a lot of expectations, catching up, and comparing notes on the youth. This proposed bill would require DCF to try to get youth to attend permanency hearings, and provide transportation if they need it. By requiring DCF to try to involve us more in the permanency process, we can have more of a voice.

This issue is important because each of us is different and we each need our own individual issues handled with care. A permanency plan is about us and for us, so we should be present for every step of it, and our voices should be what matters the most. We know what goes on in our lives daily and what we need, so we should be able to express it without hesitation or any fear of our voices being ignored because our support team feels otherwise.

This issue matters to society because youth are the future of our state. Our lives and voices matter, and youth in foster care don't often get the chance to have control over our own lives. Permanency planning is one of the few situations where we are able to voice our opinions and concerns about our lives, and DCF needs to support us in that. I feel that this bill will be able to help make sure the feelings of us youth are not being ignored, and that permanency hearings are just another thing that is decided for us and without us.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Ronaele T. Williams

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