

Center for *Children's* Advocacy

Testimony of the Center for Children's Advocacy in Opposition to S.B. 184: An Act Concerning Children in Need of Special Services

Committee on Children

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

My name is Zoe Stout and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Child Abuse Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization representing Connecticut's most at-risk youth. We submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 184, which would change the definition of "uncared for" in General Statutes Section 46b-120 to separate out youth who may be found "in need of specialized services."



Parents of children who cannot provide the specialized care that the physical, emotional or mental condition of the child requires can request voluntary admission to DCF. Children admitted to DCF on a voluntary basis are eligible for any of the services offered or administered by, or under contract with, or otherwise available to, the department—including out-of-home placement.ⁱ

If the intended consequence of changing the "specialized services" designation is for parents who request help to avoid stigmatization, they should be guided to pursue voluntary services. If a child is committed to DCF pursuant to a petition in Juvenile Court, even if the reason for adjudication is due to needing special services, the parents will still be subject to a court process which focuses on the rehabilitation of the parents.

Furthermore, pursuant to current statute, there shall be no requirement for DCF to seek custody of any child or youth with mental illness, emotional disturbance, a behavioral disorder or developmental or physical disability if such child is voluntarily placed with the department by a parent or guardian of the child for the purpose of accessing an out-of-home placement or intensive outpatient service, including, but not limited to, residential treatment programs, therapeutic foster care programs and extended day treatment programs.ⁱⁱ

Juvenile Court should remain focused on child protection petitions as there are already statutory provisions that allow for children in need of special services to access those services voluntarily.

For the foregoing reasons, we ask that you oppose Senate Bill 184.

Respectfully submitted,



Zoe Stout, J.D.
Senior Staff Attorney, Child Abuse Project

ⁱ C.G.S.A. § 17a-11

ⁱⁱ C.G.S.A. § 17a-129

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