

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Judiciary Committee  
March 18, 2016

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Testimony in SUPPORT of raised Bill No. 347  
Act establishing a program for Court Appointed Special Advocates in certain juvenile court matters.

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Thank you Senator Coleman and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to testify in support of raised Bill No. 347. My name is Patrice Comey and I am here today, with my husband Jim. We became licensed foster parents in Connecticut in 2011 and I was trained and served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer prior to that. As part of my master's degree program at Fairfield University, I worked as an intern at LifeBridge, in Bridgeport, as a behavioral health therapist. Many of my clients had been, or were currently, involved with the foster care system and I worked with several young people who were in the process of aging-out of foster care. My master's thesis and research focused on developing a success model approach to empower former foster children to achieve long-term success in life.

I have met and worked with many dedicated professionals working with foster children in Connecticut. I believe they care deeply about their work and want every foster child to be safe and to succeed in life. But DCF caseworkers, lawyers, and judges manage many cases at once and are often reassigned. Foster children need one-on-one supportive long-term relationships and too often pay a high price for this lack of consistency. CASA volunteers are assigned to one child (two at the most) and they stay involved for the long haul, through thick and thin. Not surprisingly, research

shows that foster children with a CASA volunteer do better in school, receive more services, and spend less time in foster care.

Connecticut has two wonderful CASA organizations that do great work with foster children. The problem is that under current statutory law, judges only appoint volunteer advocates under very specific and narrowly defined circumstances. As a foster parent and as a therapist, there were many foster children in my care who needed a CASA volunteer and I believe they would have benefited greatly from that relationship. I have been very frustrated and saddened that they could not have their own CASA volunteer under this great state's current laws.

This bill will allow judges to appoint more CASA volunteers to help more foster children across the state of Connecticut. It is my hope and prayer that this bill passes and goes into effect as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.