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March 12, 2016

Judiciary Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Hartford CT 06106

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 427, An Act Concerning Children in the Juvenile Justice System and Guardianship Appointment.

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am submitting this testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 427, An Act Concerning Children in the Juvenile Justice System and Guardianship Appointment. My name is Alicia Kinsman and I am the Director of Legal Services for the International Institute of Connecticut, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the needs of immigrants, refugees and foreign born victims of serious crimes. Collectively, its programs aim to help low-income families become self-sufficient and integrated, and include refugee resettlement, language services, job assistance, educational programming as well as legal immigration assistance.

The Institute maintains a special status given by the Justice Department called BIA recognition, which allows charitable organizations to practice immigration law by way of both attorneys and non-attorneys. With BIA recognition, an agency such as the Institute may then apply for their staff members to become Accredited Representatives, provided that they demonstrate an advanced knowledge in immigration proceedings.

Since 1918, the Institute has assisted thousands of Connecticut's newest Americans with their immigration needs, helping them to become U.S. Citizens, be reunited with family members, and receive relief when victimized by political persecution, human trafficking, and sexual assault, among other crimes. Our clients are resilient, hardworking, contributing members of our communities, who are transitioning to life in the United States, and often face many barriers on their journeys to gaining legal status in this country. Not surprisingly, these barriers can be especially overwhelming for our juvenile clients.