

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5332

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT  
**Title:** OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

**Vote Date:** 3/15/2018

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/6/2018

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would include eight recommendation of the Department of Children and Families: (1) require the Department of Children and Families to include in its strategic plan strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within child welfare practice; (2) require the Commissioner of Children and Families to collect data on the race and ethnicity of children and families involved with the department, and work to eliminate certain disparities based on race, ethnicity and other factors; (3) require the department to disclose records to the Chief State's Attorney for the purpose of investigating or prosecuting an allegation of fraud in the receipt of certain benefits; (4) create an exception from the requirement that the commissioner obtain consent from the parent or guardian of a child to interview such child for the purpose of investigating a claim of neglect if such parent or guardian is the perpetrator of the alleged neglect; (5) require certain health care providers to notify the department of newborns exhibiting certain symptoms consistent with prenatal substance exposure and other conditions and require the department to establish guidelines for the safe care of such newborns; (6) clarify the definition of "fictive kin caregiver"; (7) clarify that certain residential facilities may care for or board a child without a license obtained from the commissioner; and (8) permit the commissioner to investigate and maintain actions in the name of the state for violations of certain statutes pertaining to the unlicensed caring for, boarding of and placing of a child.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:**

The Child Advocate testified in favor of Section 5 of this bill because the current law is inadequate to ensure the safety of children and permit DCF to complete its investigative duties where there are accepted reports of suspected child maltreatment. Section 5 would permit DCF to interview a child who is also alleged to be a victim of neglect. The vast majority of concerns that are brought to DCF's attention are cases of child neglect. Many of the highest risk cases that DCF investigates and responds to are cases that involve neglect allegations and very young children or children with disabilities. This bill would address the issue of not being granted access to a child when their safety is believed to be at risk.

**Susan Hamilton, Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection, Office of Chief Public Defender:**

The director testified in favor of Sections 1 and 2 of this bill. As this Committee is aware, the OCPD oversees the contracts with Assigned Counsel who represent children and parents in child protection proceedings in the juvenile court, and our in-house public defenders are also now representing children in these cases. Accordingly, the OCPD has a vested interest in working with DCF and others to address disproportionality in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. This bill would supplement existing efforts across these systems to gather reliable data on the ethnicity and race of children and families served by these systems and to help ameliorate disparate outcomes across racial and ethnic groups.

**Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services:**

Testimony was submitted in support of Section 8 of this bill. A week-long cross-agency Lean event took place in November 2017, which resulted in a number of legislative proposals aimed at lessening the administrative impact on nonprofits and reducing time away from the individuals who they support. DMHAS would like to publicly support the workgroup recommendations including the one contained in this bill.

**Raul Pino, Commissioner, Department of Public Health:**

The Commissioner submitted testimony in support of Section 8. This contains a recommendation that came from the Lean event with several agencies. The Department of Public Health is supportive of the recommendations outlined in this bill.

**Jordan Scheff, Commissioner, Department of Developmental Services:**

The Commissioner submitted testimony in support of Section 8. It is believed that this proposal, along with other Lean related proposals before the Public Health Committee this session, are a step in the right direction for both the state agencies involved and our private provider partners as we continue to improve and evolve the service system by lessening administrative burdens and focusing more on the needs of individuals with intellectual disability supported by this Department.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Maegan Faitsch, Legal Intern & Zoe Stout, Senior Staff Attorney, Center for Children's Advocacy:**

Testimony was submitted in favor of Section 1 and Section 5 of this bill. It is believed that incorporating data into the analysis of how to improve DCF's response to racial and ethnic groups who experience higher rates of adverse child welfare outcomes will help inform decision makers to bring about meaningful substantive change. Additionally, Section 5 is supported because the current statute already allows for a child's interview without parental consent in cases of alleged abuse, therefore there should not be a distinction between abuse and neglect in the context of DCF's authority to interview a child.

**Susan Kelley, Director, Alliance for Children's Mental Health**

ACMH supports this bill which requires DCF to collect and standardize its data on ethnic and racial disparities (RED) concerning the child welfare system. Identifying and taking action to ameliorate mental health disparities among people of color in our state's child serving systems must be a top priority, and they applaud DCF's focus and inclusion of this data as it seeks to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system.

**Christina Quaranta, Director of Policy and Community Connections, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance:**

The Juvenile Justice Alliance testified in support of Sections 1 and 2 of this bill. Because the existence of racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare systems within Connecticut and across the country is well documented, the Alliance applauds and supports DCF's recognition of this problem and its commitment to meaningful steps to eliminate it.

**Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance:**

The Alliance supports Section 8 of this bill because it will ease the burden on providers and will free up valuable administrative time and money to focus more on providing services.

**Stan Soby, Vice President of Public Policy & External Affairs, Oak Hill:**

The Vice President testified in support of Section 8 of this bill because it will ease the burden on providers and will free up valuable administrative time and money to focus more on providing services.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None submitted.

**Reported by: Mikhela Hull**

**Date: 3/22/18**