



State of Connecticut

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COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
MARCH 6, 2018

H.B. No. 5332 (RAISED)
AAC THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) supports **S.B. No. 5332 – AAC THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**, which is aimed at gathering data and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in the area of child welfare practice.

Section 1 of this bill would require the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to identify racial and ethnic disparities within child welfare practice and work to eliminate such disparities as part of its strategic plan mandated by CGS Sec. 17a-3(b). Similarly, Section 2 of the bill would expand the Commissioner's statutory responsibilities enumerated in CGS Section 17a-6 to include establishing a standardized data reporting system to support the collection of data regarding the race and ethnicity of children and families referred to DCF at key decision points and the rates of retention of children and families by race and ethnicity. In addition, it would expand these statutory responsibilities to include working to eliminate disparities in referral rates, substantiations, placements and retention among racial and ethnic groups and groups known to experience higher rates of adverse child welfare, health and service outcomes due to religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, socioeconomic status,

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immigration status, language, ancestry, intellectual or physical disability, mental health status, prior criminal convictions, homelessness, gender identity or expression or geographic area of residence.

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.

The OCPD appreciates this Committee's interest in understanding and addressing this critical issue, and we look forward to continue working with you and others toward this end.