Committee on Children
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6403
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING A CHILDREN IN CARE BILL OF RIGHTS AND EXPECTATIONS AND THE SIBLING BILL OF RIGHTS.

Vote Date: 3/7/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 2/28/2019
File No.: 

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Committee on Children

REASONS FOR BILL:
To establish a Children in Care Bill of Rights and Expectations for foster children and to mandate caseworkers to provide foster children with the Sibling Bill of Rights annually.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Representative Jeff Currey:
Representative Currey submitted testimony in support of this bill. He mentioned that children in the foster care system have a right to know their rights and to advocate for themselves. He believes that having access to this information will set healthy expectations of household responsibility. He also expressed that prior efforts to make this information available to children have been inadequate. For these reasons he strongly supports this bill.

Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families:
The commissioner expressed support for this bill with amended language. She believes that children should have the tools necessary to be able to advocate for themselves. She also suggested changes in the language to include the DCF Area Office chain of command as another resource for children to voice their concerns.

Susan J. Hamilton, State of Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services:
Susan expressed her support for this bill with proposed amendments. She believes that this bill would allow children to advocate for themselves. She expressed that legislators should amend the language in this bill to exclude the phrase “pursuant to an order of temporary
custody or commitment” from the bill. The removal of this phrase would ensure that rights are afforded to all children in DCF.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Margaret Doherty, Connecticut Alliance of Foster & Adoptive Children:**
Margaret expressed her support for this bill. She mentioned that this organization supports foster and adoptive families statewide, and believes that children should have access to information regarding their rights in the system.

**Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:**
Sarah expressed her support for this bill. She mentioned that this bill would give children greater autonomy and make them aware of the rights that they have. She also mentioned that this legislation will enable children to use their voices and advocate for themselves.

**Deb Kelleher, Annie C. Courtney Foundation, Inc.:**
Deb expressed her support for this bill. She mentioned that this foundation supports foster and adoptive families as well as children in the system. She believes that this bill would provide protection to vulnerable children. She urges legislators to move the bill forward.

**Stephanie Luczak:**
Stephanie expressed her support for this bill with proposed amendments. She shared her struggles of growing up in a family with issues such as substance abuse and interpersonal violence, and mentioned that the most important aspect of becoming who she is today was the stability she found in school. She also expressed that this bill would provide stability to these children by making them aware of the rights that they have. She proposed three amendments; adding “racial identity” to Section 1(b), defining the “appropriate age” to be children ages 12 and older within the language, and identifying that the youth and caseworker will both sign the Bill of Rights and Expectations after the meeting to ensure that it was reviewed by both parties.

**Jessica Nelson, Connecticut Voices For Children:**
Jessica expressed her support for this bill. She mentioned that the adolescent years are a time for exploration and finding one’s true identity. This bill will assure that these children feel comfortable in the environments that they are in, or speak up if they feel otherwise. By making children aware of these rights, they can navigate their way through self-discovery with the support of their communities, schools and families.

**Elizabeth R. Panico, Center for Children’s Advocacy:**
Elizabeth expressed her support for this bill. She mentioned that current law provides rights for children, but does not provide ways to ensure they are aware of their rights and how to obtain resources that could help them if they feel their rights are violated. She expressed that it is extremely important for children to have help from adults in terms of their rights, and being able to understand them. She believes that this bill will lead to a better future for these children.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.