

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-283

AN ACT EXTENDING THE AGE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR LEGAL REPRESENTATION PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND

**Title:** FAMILIES.

**Vote Date:** 3/10/2020

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/3/2020

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would extend the age, from 18-23 years, that an individual in the custody of the Department of Children and Families can receive legal representation.

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

### **Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner Department of Children and Families**

The Department of Children and Families is not opposed to youth having continuing access to services, and many stay in voluntary services, but legal services are provided for the individuals by the Office of Chief Public Defender pursuant to C.G.S. section 51-296a. There would need to be a change in statute to make this possible.

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

The Office of the Child Advocate supports the intent of the legislation. While many youth can access services provided by DCF until the age of 23, they can't access an attorney. These youth are already vulnerable, suffering from traumas they experienced, or in need of extra services. Extending the age will bring Connecticut up to date with surrounding states.

### **Susan Hamilton, Division of Public Defenders Services**

While the Division of Public Defenders does not dispute the benefit of continued legal services, they are worried about the increased cost that comes with it. Asking attorneys to take on these cases, which can sometimes last years, shouldn't be done without increased funding.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Alexis**

Alexis urges passage of this bill to help protect those that aren't getting the services they need. Like her, many individuals are not aware to the end of their services and this legislation will help them make the adjustment.

### **Tatiana Beckford**

Tatiana supports this legislation. She has first hand experience of the DCF support system and its benefits. Extending the age from 18-23 will only help individuals near the end of their time with the Department.

### **Connecticut Voices for Children**

Connecticut Voices for Children supports this legislation with some changes for clarity. They recommend language that says, "A child shall be represented by counsel knowledgeable about representing such children who shall be assigned to represent the child by the office of Chief Public Defender, or appointed by the court if there is an immediate need for the appointment of counsel during a proceeding. This appointment will last as long as the child remains under the Department's supervision, unless otherwise determined by the court."

### **Kathleen Flaherty, Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.**

The Connecticut Legal Rights Project supports the passage of this bill. It would help ensure support for those who decide to stay in the Department of Children and Families supervision. It will help them make the transition to adulthood.

### **Kai Green**

Kai is testifying in support of this legislation. He has first hand knowledge of how those that age out of DCF services have a difficult time adjusting. Continuing these services until the age of 23 will benefit everyone.

### **Joshua**

The Department of Children and Families is the one constant thing these individuals have in their life. Continuation of services until the age of 23 will be a major assistance to those transitioning into adulthood.

### **Stacy Schleif, Center for Children's Advocacy**

While they support the intent of the bill, the Office of the Chief Public Defender, not the Department of Children and Families, should be the ones to have this responsibility. The Office of the Chief Public Defender sees those between the ages of 18-23 as the most vulnerable without legal representation.

### **Jaqueline Swagerty**

Jaqueline supports this proposed legislation. It is important to those nearing the end of their time with DCF services to realize what is going on. At this age, not everything they are being asked to sign or do is clear. This would help.

**Erin Williamson, U.S. Program Director, LOVE146**

LOVE146 supports this legislation. It will ensure better representation for older youth as they navigate leaving the Department of Children and Families care.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Peter Murszewski**

**Date: 4/2/2020**