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**SUPPORT Raised S.B. No. 92 Session Year 2020
FEBRUARY 18, 2020**

Representative Linehan, Senator Moore, Representative Comey, Senator Anwar, Representative Green, Senator Kelly and distinguished members of the Committee on Children.

Raised *SB-92 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SERVICES. To require the Commissioner of Children and Families to conduct a study to determine whether policy and procedural changes in the Department of Children and Families may increase the effectiveness of services provided to children.

1-REMOVAL AND REUNIFICATION OF CHILDREN BY DCF

On December 1, 2017, Danbury DCF removed my daughter, Brooklyn Ortiz from my physical custody due to a visitation violation.

A day earlier on November 30, 2017, Bridgeport Juvenile Court Judge James Ginnochio ruled to not hold me in contempt for a visitation order for refusing to return my daughter to her mother's home after a reported heroin overdose.

DCF ignored the court's ruling and removed my daughter anyway.

The DCF Removal Policy was not followed.

Upon my daughters removal, DCF failed to follow its own policy 36-48, Alternatives to Removal & 36-60, Relative Placement & 36-30-1, Services to Prevent Out of Home Services & Facilitate Reunification

Upon my daughters wrongful removal, 7 willing and qualified relatives came forward as available placement options for Brooklyn. 4 of the 7 are certified foster parents.

Connecticut General Statute 17a-175 requires DCF to exercise due diligence in exploring potential placement with relatives. None of my relatives were ever contacted including a paternal aunt residing 4 blocks from the Danbury DCF office. Several relatives were already known to the department prior to the child's 4th removal. An ICPC application was finally submitted in June 2019. 19 months after federal regulations require the application to be submitted.

2-SIBLING VISITATION

Connecticut General Statute 17a-10a requires DCF to document a sibling visitation plan. To this date, there is no sibling visitation plan in my daughter's case plan. My daughters have not visited with one another in almost 2 years now. In fact, Brooklyn's older sister has been excluded from her case plan while the mother's heroin using boyfriend was on the case plan. DCF intentionally failed to preserve the biological bond between my daughter and her older sibling.

3-FAMILY THERAPY

DCF continues to refuse family therapy to my daughter and I. My daughter and I were attending counseling and parenting services prior to the removal. Pursuant to the Dept. of Human Services Office of the Child Advocate, Welfare Chapter 413, Division 70, Substitute Care, parents are permitted to include a certified social worker at visits. DCF is intentionally alienating my child from her father.

Raised *HB-5142 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S SAFETY. To require the Commissioner of Children and Families to conduct a study to determine whether policy and procedural changes within the Department of Children and Families may increase the safety of children.

1-REPORTING INJURY OF A CHILD

On March 2, 2018, my daughter suffered an accidental 2nd degree burn to her right hand. The injury was not reported to a supervisor or to the parents. Connecticut General Statute 17a-145-146, requires DCF to report an injury within 6 hours of the incident. The child was not taken to be examined by a physician until the father requested it after discovering the burn on his own 5 days after the injury. A violation of the DCF Policy 34-11. To date, the Department has no record of the injury being reported in the child's case file. 5 days remain blank during the time of the injury. DCF continues to refuse to release any information from the 5 days.

2-UNSANITARY CONDITIONS AT THE DCF VISITATION ROOMS

After filing a discrimination complaint to the Ombudsman's Office, Danbury DCF forced me to have visits with my child in a rat feces and ant infested room for 6 weeks. The Ombudsman's office never replied to my complaint.

3-UNQUALIFIED CASE WORKERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CRITICAL CLINICAL CONDITIONS

DCF has now diagnosed me with a mental illness without having me examined by a qualified mental health professional. There are currently 3 masters degree level caseworkers and one licensed masters of social work supervisor in my case. None of which are qualified to diagnose me with a mental illness.

Currently I have been examined by 4 qualified mental health professionals.

(1 Psychiatrist & 3 Psychologist) All of which have assessed me as an appropriate and fit parent.

4-TRAINING FOR FOSTER PARENTS

The current foster parent is a decent person. However she has made mistakes that placed my child in danger when she was not permitted to be examined by a Dr. at the time of the 2nd degree burn. The foster mother was not properly trained in proper protocol in reporting an injury. The foster parent was unaware of her rights and responsibilities as a foster parent including her role in preserving the child's biological bond with her family. This included religious worship and cultural family traditions.

5-OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

I have called the Ombudsman's office 27 times since my daughters' removal. They have never returned my call. Parents have a right to file complaints and grievances. I have never been given a chance to present my complaints.

Violation after violation continues to occur in my child's case and the Danbury DCF office continues to operate above the law. This unethical and unlawful supervision of my child's case has now resulted in the recommendation of adoption with a non relative and the termination of my parental rights. Something needs to be done for our children in care.