



*Division of Public Defender Services
State of Connecticut*

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**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE RAPILLO
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**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
MARCH 3, 2015**

RAISED BILL No. 6899 AN ACT EXPANDING GUARDIANSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF THE FEDERAL PREVENTING SEX TRAFFICKING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT.

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports passage of **Raised Bill 6899, An Act Expanding Guardianship Opportunities for Children and Implementing Provisions of the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act**. This proposal contains a number of statutory changes aimed at improving outcomes for children in the care and custody of the Department of Children and Families. A number of changes would have the court focus on efforts to secure a permanent family connecting for children and to give the child a voice in the planning process. Much of this proposal is aimed at making daily life more normal for children in foster and congregate care.

Throughout Raised Bill 6899, caregivers of children in DCF custody are given an increased ability to allow a child to engage in normal childhood activities many of us take for granted. This is an effort to allow children in DCF to have more experiences allowing decision making by the immediate caregiver and not requiring approval by a DCF worker for events like trips to the mall with a friend. Currently, there are barriers for children in foster care to participate in activities like field trips and sleepovers. For a child in care, these simple activities require permission from DCF, as the Department is legally responsible for the child. Sleepovers often require criminal or child abuse checks on every adult present, as required by DCF licenses. All these layers of approval make it hard for kids in DCF care to have normal experiences. This proposal would allow caregivers, including staff at congregate care facilities to make decisions on behalf of the child using the “reasonable and prudent parent” standard.



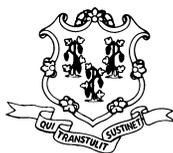
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Raised Bill 6899 also makes changes to the list of acceptable permanency options for younger children. Currently, long term foster care or an alternative planned living arrangement (APLA) is an allowable permanent plan for a child whose parent's rights have been terminated and efforts at adoption have been unsuccessful for over ten months. This proposal would limit the APLA designation to children over the age of 16. Even when an APLA plan had been approved, this proposal would require the court to question what efforts had been made to find the child a permanent home any time the plan was reviewed and to inquire as to the child's wishes regarding their living arrangement. OCPD has begun a pilot program to provide enhanced representation to children with an APLA plan and this agency fully supports a statutory requirement that APLA be limited to children over the age of 16.

Raised Bill 6899 contains proposals designed to increase permanent placements for children. Section 6 creates a new designation of "fictive kin" as a possible foster care placement for children. This is a non relative with a close relationship to a child. Section 11 supports permanency by continuing the guardianship subsidy past the child's eighteenth birthday if the youth remains in an approved educational vocational or job training program or if the subsidy is approved by the commissioner. Families and others would be encouraged to take guardianship of a child if they do not fear they will lose the financial support provided to assist the cost of education or job training. Section 12 requires that grandparents and other relatives be indentified and notified when a child is taken into DCF care, and that the notice include instructions on becoming an approved caregiver or foster parents.

Raised Bill 6899 contains many initiatives that will allow children who remain in DCF care to experience a more normal life and be permanently connected to a family or caring individual. The Office of Chief Public Defender supports these efforts and asks this Committee to act favorably on this proposal.



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