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**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
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**Proposed H.B. No. 6297 AN ACT CONCERNING VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT IN THE
CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Proposed House Bill 6297, An Act Concerning Voluntary Placement in the Custody of the Department of Children and Families appears aimed at addressing concerns from parents who seek assistance for their children who suffer from severe mental health issues or developmental disabilities. Services for these severely impacted families are expensive and not readily available. Families often gain access to these services through the Department of Children and Families. Much of the service is provided in the community through a Voluntary Services agreement between the parents and DCF. This allows parents to utilize intensive in home services and partial hospitalization programs. When those programs are inadequate to meet the child's needs, out of home or residential care is necessary. In order to access this costly service, parents must either agree to have their child committed to DCF as "uncared for" or face a contested process in juvenile court where the child may be adjudicated as neglected. In fact, many of these children are not neglected, they simply suffer from an illness or condition that no parent could address on their own.

Parent groups have recently formed and been actively advocating for another way to access critical care for their children, without being forced to give up custody to the state. This proposal is a step towards that process. The Office of Chief Public Defender supports this proposal and efforts to help support parents in their effort to maintain guardianship over their ill or disabled children. As the Agency that provides legal counsel to indigent parents and children in child welfare actions, we would welcome the opportunity to provide input into the final details of the legislation.