



# State of Connecticut

## DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN  
MARCH 6, 2018**

**S.B. No. 324 (RAISED)  
AAC A PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS**

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The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) supports **S.B. No. 324 – AAC A PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS** but would offer some helpful amendments to promote the likely intent of the bill.

As written, this bill would require the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to establish a parents' bill of rights by January 1, 2019 and enumerates the rights that must be included. The bill as currently raised defines a "parent" as the biological or adoptive parent of a child placed in the care or custody of DCF pursuant to an order of temporary custody or commitment.

As this Committee is aware, the OCPD oversees the contracts with Assigned Counsel who represent children and parents in child protection proceedings in the juvenile court, and our in-house public defenders are also now representing children in these cases. Accordingly, the OCPD has a vested interest in ensuring that parents are aware of their legal rights in dealings with DCF. While this is important throughout the period of DCF involvement, it is particularly critical *prior* to any court involvement or removal when parents are more likely to be without legal representation. To that end,

the OCPD would propose that the definition of “parent” be expanded to include *all* parents who are being investigated or assessed by DCF for suspected abuse or neglect and not just parents whose children have already been removed from their home. If the definition of “parent” is to remain limited to a parent whose child has already been removed from the home, the definition should also include the parent of a child removed under a ninety-six hour hold issued pursuant to CGS Sec. 17a-101g.

Lastly, the OCPD would recommend that any such Parents’ Bill of Rights established by DCF include input from a specified list of agencies and stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the OCPD and parent representatives. The OCPD appreciates this Committee’s interest in promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children, and we’d be happy to work with you and others on any amended language that might help to promote these goals and the intent of this bill.