

**Testimony Supporting S.B. 1043, An Act Concerning Access to Records of the Department of Children and Families.**

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Select Committee on Children  
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Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, an independent, research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 1043, An Act Concerning Access to Records of the Department of Children and Families.

Though the bill broadly revises the DCF confidentiality statute, we restrict our testimony today to subdivision (9) of subsection (g) of Section 1, which clarifies the circumstances under which information can be shared with foster and prospective adoptive parents.

Too frequently, foster parents complain that they do not receive the background information they need to provide quality care to their foster children. In exit interviews conducted for DCF by the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, Inc., 32.5% of former foster care providers disagreed with the statement, "DCF informed me of the foster child's needs at the time of placement."<sup>1</sup>

Consider the following comment from one Connecticut foster parent, who was not given basic medical background information on a drug-exposed newborn in her care:

"Those children have to be dealt with differently than your own, they were born to a different set of circumstances. I had to look on the computer – how to deal with the uncontrollable shaking, then he was quiet and we thought he had hearing loss, he threw up for two months, all these things, I had to find the information on the computer. We didn't get enough information on him, it would help if they could at least tell us what kind of drug his mother tested positive for, so we could better help him. We are left to figure out what the problem is, but that is worse for the child."<sup>2</sup>

Currently, Connecticut's confidentiality laws make it difficult to ensure that prospective and actual foster parents reliably receive information necessary to provide excellent care.<sup>3</sup> S.B. 1043 would *require* the department to release confidential information to foster parents "when necessary to address the social, medical, psychological, or educational needs of the child or youth, provided no information identifying a biological parent is disclosed" without permission.<sup>4</sup>

Such legislation would improve the quality of care provided to young people in foster homes. Indeed, Lorrie Lutz of the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning notes that “sharing information about the birth family and the child with the resource family is critical to the resource family’s role of creating a safe environment for the child.”<sup>5</sup> This legislative change would be a welcome step in treating foster families as a valuable resource in the treatment plan, consistent with best practices in child welfare. We therefore encourage you to support S.B. 1043.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> CT Voices analysis of Foster Parent Exit Interviews summaries, FY 2007 through FY 2008, prepared by the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, Inc. for the Department of Children and Families.

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, Inc., Post Licensing Retention Interviews, Renewal dates Jan-Feb 2011, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut law currently gives DCF the discretion to determine when to release confidential information to an individual authorized to care for an abused or neglected child. See Conn. Gen. Stat. 17a-28(g)(4). However, in practice this discretion can lead to variations in practice – and even misunderstandings among workers -- as to what extent, and under what circumstances, they can release confidential information about a child to foster parents.

<sup>4</sup> See DCF’s 2011 Legislative Proposals, Proposal #1 (“Access to Records Concerning Children and Families.”) DCF recommends this revision to the statute “to provide greater clarity and consistency related to the confidentiality statutes,” noting that “there can be instances when this unwillingness or inability to allow disclosure impedes the Department’s ability to protect a child or provide appropriate treatment.” Id. at 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lutz, Lorrie L. *Relationship Between Public Child Welfare Workers, Resource Families and Birth Families: Preventing the Triangulation of the Triangle of Support*. The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. Hunter College of Social Work. March, 2005, p. 28.