



Testimony Re: H-5672 An Act Relating to Domestic Relations -- Adoption Of Children

House Judiciary Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 5672. We would like to thank Representative Casimiro for sponsoring this important bill, and Representatives Noret, Donovan, Cotter, Roberts, Read, Fellela, Serpa, and Spears for co-sponsoring. This bill would establish the rights of adoptive/foster children or those in guardianship, to have post-separation visitation with their sibling(s).

Children who are removed from their families suffer trauma leading into and including removal. This trauma compounds when children remain in foster care for years and are moved to different placements. Children need stability, permanency, and safety for healthy development. Whenever possible, it is best for children and families to remain together. Removal from the home may be necessary for the child's safety and well-being; however, critical connections and a sense of permanency may be lost when a child is placed out-of-home. Children in out-of-home care can experience multiple placements, which creates many opportunities to lose contact with family members and siblings. Separation from siblings can compound the trauma experienced by children placed in foster care. Preserving sibling relationships can help children maintain a sense of identity and family connection during an already unstable time in their lives.

The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* (2008) promotes permanency through supports for relative guardianship and incentives for adoption. It also requires states to make reasonable efforts to place siblings together when it is in the children's best interest if they are removed from home, and in the case of separated siblings, it also requires states to make reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visits/interactions, unless it would be harmful to the children and not in their best interest. As of 2018, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington had statutes allowing written and enforceable contact agreements for post-adoption/guardianship sibling visitation.

Allowing children who have been in care the right to visit, contact, and interact with their siblings can promote a sense of belonging, and have a significant impact on their development.

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We urge passage of House Bill 5672, granting children and youth the opportunity to maintain critical familial ties. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

