



To: House Judiciary Committee

From: Marcie Baker-Hinds

Support H5672

March 4, 2025

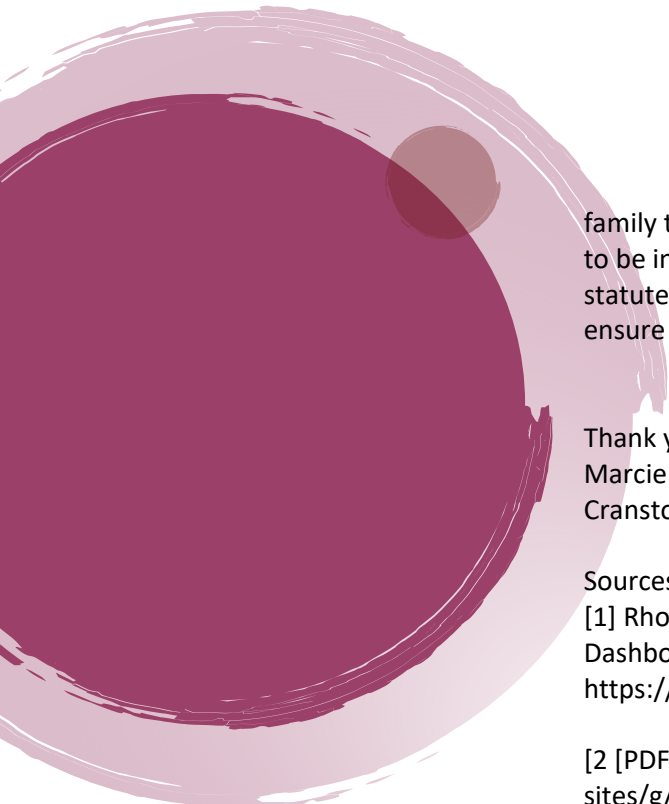
Dear House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Marcie Baker-Hinds and I am in support of H5672 which would establish the rights of adoptive/foster youth, or those in guardianship, to have post-separation visitation with their siblings.

I am in support of this bill because as a Child Welfare professional for over 25 years and adoptive parent of siblings separated by adoption, I have seen and experienced the detriment of sibling separation. Sibling relationships are often the longest lasting relationship in a person's life. Unfortunately, all too often children are separated from their siblings when they become involved with the foster care system. RI DCYF data indicates that as of November 2024, there were approximately 2,322 children in the foster care system with 1,322 in out-of-home care and 1,000 children in in-home care. According to a 2020 Casey Program Brief, an estimated 53-80% will experience separation from at least one sibling. By no fault of their own, children are having their sibling connections severed. The detrimental effects of these losses can continue throughout their lifetime and affect their sense of identity, culture and overall well-being. As Tanesha Grant (adult adoptee) states it "I will never get over the loss of our relationship, which I was helpless to stop from happening as a child".

There are current statutes, such as The Rhode Island - Siblings Bill of Rights, that mandate reasonable efforts be made to place children together and support visitation when they must be placed separately. However, these statutes are limited to governance only while children are open to the foster care system. When a sibling is adopted, there is no longer any legal responsibility to ensure that the relationship will be protected and maintained. The future of that sibling relationship then rests upon the goodwill of the adoptive or guardianship family. It becomes assumed that families will support these important relationships. We know from the many siblings affected by these practices, that a lot of harm has been done by well-intended families who did not honor their word.

Legislation is needed to help siblings maintain their birth rights to remain connected. Children experience so much trauma and loss when they enter the foster care system. Loss of a sibling should not be included. Legislation that would mandate the inclusion of a plan for sibling connections post finalization for adoption or guardianship to proceed, is needed. Legislation is needed that would include agreements by the adoptive or guardianship



family to maintain, support and encourage sibling connections. There needs to be increased accountability for the Child Welfare system to ensure the statutes that exist are enforced. H5672 will address these problems and ensure sibling connections are prioritized as a right and not a privilege.

Thank you for your consideration,
Marcie Baker-Hinds
Cranston

Sources

[1] Rhode Department of Children Youth and Families Strategic Metrics Dashboard November 2024
<https://dcyf.ri.gov/media/4101/download?language=en>

[2 [PDF] Rhode Island Siblings Bill of Rights - RI DCYF <https://dcyf.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur416/files/2024/04/Sibling%20Bill%20of%20Rights%20English%20.pdf>

