

# Committee on Children

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5004 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND  
**Title:** TRANSPARENCY.

**Vote Date:** 3/5/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/3/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Committee on Children

### CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th Dist.  
Rep. Christopher Poulos, 81st Dist.  
Rep. Hector Arzeno, 151st Dist.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill aims to implement policies related to the provision and oversight of child welfare services by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for the purpose of bringing transparency and accountability to the child welfare system in Connecticut. In light of recent tragedies regarding child abuse and the shortcomings of the Department, the Committee seeks to provide DCF with the resources required to supply the childcare workforce with the necessary training and tools to better enable them to safely accomplish their work and manage their caseload. Additionally, this bill attempts to facilitate and prioritize kinship placements to allow children to remain in more stable environments that are close to home. The final component of this legislation works to bolster transparency and public awareness of the work of the Department by creating a new online dashboard that provides real-time information on DCF programs and performance, along with other publicly available information and training.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

**LCO 2769:** In Sec. 10, the substitute language increases the age of initial eligibility for the DCF postsecondary education grant program from 21 to 26, and increases the age at which a person becomes ineligible for participation from 26 to 28. This change is intended to allow

former foster youth from unstable backgrounds more time to attain postsecondary education. In Sec. 20, it adds the Chief Public Defender to the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee because of their expertise in child welfare and custody cases. The last component adds a requirement that monthly subsidies paid through DCF's subsidized guardianship program be equal to any foster care maintenance payment that would have been paid on behalf of the child if the child were in foster care. This establishes equitable payment regardless of the position of the person with guardianship over the child.

#### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Department of Children & Families, Interim Commissioner, Susan Hamilton:** The Commissioner appreciates the committee's efforts, but finds select sections of the bill counterproductive to the Department's goals. DCF recognizes the importance of kinship caregiving and notes that DCF's budget is limited in what it can take on with newly proposed grant programs. The Department argues that existing measures shouldn't be duplicated, as would be the case with internship programs, parent protections, data dashboards, oversight committees, and staff training.

**Office of Chief Public Defender, Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection, Renee Cimino:** The Office supports the emergency placement and grant program measures in the bill, including Sections 1-2, 4, 5, and 10. The Office asks, however, that the maximum age that a youth can access these grants be extended to 26. Additionally, they request membership on the Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee.

**Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, Children's Policy Analysts, Christian Duborg, Melvette Hill, Yukiyo Iida, and Thomas Nuccio:** The Commission voices support for the bill, as it strengthens transparency, coordination among agencies, public awareness, accountability, and child safety. They highlight the importance of Sections 8, 12-13, 14-17, 22, and 23 and ask, in addition to the public awareness campaign, that the public be informed about the signs of child abuse and neglect.

**Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Christina Ghio:** The Office testifies in support of the bill and emphasizes the importance of further DCF oversight and their sharing of additional outcomes for children. The Child Advocate appreciates making grants available to kinship caregivers, securing access to postsecondary education, and expanding access to Urgent Crisis Centers.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut State House Republican Caucus, Minority Leader Vincent Candelora:** The Caucus and Rep. Candelora are encouraged by the bill and suggest to the Committee that the language be expanded to include group home settings. Group homes are critical for housing children and providing stability, supervision, and therapeutic support. Additionally, they express their hope that a working group could be established to recommend policy changes to expedite the removal of sexual and physical assault victims from dangerous placements. This should include members from DCF, the Office of the Child Advocate, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Department of Social Services.

**Center for Children’s Advocacy, Executive Director, Sarah Eagan:** Ms. Eagan testifies in support of the bill’s intent. However, she writes that consideration should go beyond child welfare data dashboards, oversight councils, and financial support, primarily by exploring Title IV-E reimbursement, continuums of behavioral health care, and foster care rate-setting structures. She suggests that the bill should integrate, “...the current Statewide Advisory Committee pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 17a-4 into an independent oversight body, maintaining the responsibilities inherent in federal law for Citizen Review Panels, and ensuring the independent staffing contemplated by the bill drafters.” Lastly, she highlights the need for increased funding in the DCF budget for state-contracted and Medicaid-funded services, along with adult behavioral health services.

**Connecticut Children’s Alliance, Executive Director, Krystal Rich:** Ms. Rich offers general support alongside suggestions for several sections of the bill. These include rigorous safety standards for the provisions regarding kinship placement and providing more holistic access to stabilization resources for foster youth. In reference to the dashboard, she writes, “...Child Advocacy Centers collect a wide range of data that reflects the full multidisciplinary response when there is an allegation of child abuse, including forensic interviews, medical exams, victim advocacy services, mental health referrals, law enforcement investigations, prosecutorial involvement, and court outcomes. That broader lens can help illustrate the full system response beyond DCF’s component alone. If implemented, we would welcome the opportunity to support the working group’s efforts and share perspective on how multidisciplinary data can contribute to a complete and more accurate picture of child protection practice statewide.” For the Urgent Crisis Center component, she highlights the need to expand geographic access to this model to strengthen the behavioral health safety net for children across the state.

**Connecticut Voices for Children, Research & Policy Director, Emily Knox:** Dr. Knox testifies that this bill invests in the conditions that keep children safest. Ms. Knox advocates for Sections 1-2, 10, 12-13, and 14-23, arguing that they include systematic and structural improvements, barrier-breaking pathways, and codify support for the future. However, in reference to the proposed dashboard, she states that, “...transparency mandates are only as strong as the analytic infrastructure behind them. If the Legislature’s goal is meaningful transparency, then reporting mandates should be paired with explicit investments in analytic capacity. Well-resourced dashboards can become powerful policy tools. Under-resourced mandates risk becoming compliance exercises.”

**Connecticut Area Health Education Center Network, Associate Director, Cecil Tengtenga:** Mr. Tengtenga testifies that the bill emphasizes transparency and learning. He adds that CT AHEC’s aggregated, longitudinal data reveals how oversight can inform improvement without stigmatizing families. Additionally, he argues, “Connecticut does not need to invent new systems to meet these goals. The systems already exist, are trusted by families and educators, and are producing measurable results. Aligning policy with these proven pathways will strengthen children, families, and the state’s long-term economic future.”

**Kate Dormont:** As a licensed foster parent, Ms. Dormont states that the bill does good by increasing access to postsecondary education and broadening inclusion of kinship care. She argues that legislation should place the continuum of care above departmental dashboards. However, she notes that there are critical pieces missing from this bill, including adequate

access to behavioral health services for foster youth, addressing gaps in the continuum of care for wellbeing and behavioral health, and making foster youth and foster families' voices heard by DCF. She recommends taking inspiration from New Jersey's Service Array or Wisconsin's Wraparound Milwaukee.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**The Children's Center, Chief Operating Officer, Sarah Lockery:** As Co-Chair of the DCF State Advisory Council and the Chief Operating Officer at The Children's Center in Hamden, Ms. Lockery suggests alternatives for the Committee to address the problems in the child welfare system. She believes that the development of an oversight council will not achieve the desired outcomes. Instead, she advocates for increased funding to the state's behavioral health system and the establishment of an infrastructure of prevention and community-based services to address the complexities and traumas of the state's most vulnerable children. Moreover, she argues that the mandates of child protection and behavioral health are too much for one sole agency to bear and can often lead to behavioral health being neglected. Lastly, she testifies that the state needs to invest further in Citizen Review Panels.

**The Alliance Voice of Community Nonprofits, Public Policy and Advocacy Associate Emmeline Franklin:** On behalf of the Alliance, Ms. Franklin express appreciation for the intent of the bill; however, she raises concerns about systemic challenges within DCF that the bill doesn't address. Specifically, she notes that Connecticut has dramatically reduced the use of residential treatment over the past decade. While the reduction of unnecessary placements is an important goal, there are unanswered questions as to whether children are being successfully treated at lower levels of care and if there are pressures elsewhere in the system that may be masking unmet needs. She maintains that, "Residential treatment should never be the default, but it must remain available for the limited number of youth whose needs cannot be safely or effectively met in a family setting, at least not immediately... For a small but important subset of youth, residential treatment is not a failure of the system, it is a steppingstone to permanency." The Alliance is prepared to collaborate with the legislature and DCF to define success as measurable improvements in child stability, safety, and long-term outcomes.

**Reported by: Mia Giglietti, Zachary Robinson,  
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