



Testimony in Support of Proposed Bill 6321

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONNECTICUT PARENTAGE ACT

Judiciary Committee
Monday, March 8, 2021

Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), a non-profit organization representing Connecticut's most at-risk children. CCA's mission is to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of our state's most vulnerable children and young adults who are dependent upon the judicial, child welfare, health and mental health, education, and juvenile justice systems for their care. I lead CCA's Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital, where we collaborate with medical providers to address legal issues impacting children's health, including education, benefits, guardianship, and housing. In this capacity, I witness the critical importance of promoting children's interests in stable relationships with their parents in order to promote kids' health and well-being.

The Center for Children's Advocacy supports Proposed Bill 6321, the Connecticut Parentage Act (CPA).

The Center for Children's Advocacy founding was premised on the belief that every child is deserving of protection, regardless of the circumstances surrounding them or their family. Currently, gaps in Connecticut law fail to protect children's relationships with certain unmarried, nonbiological, or same-sex parents. Instead, the law treats those parents as legal strangers to their children, regardless of the depth of the parent-child bond or how long they have been caring for the child. The CPA would ensure that all children have equal access to the security of a legal parent-child relationship, notwithstanding the circumstances of their birth, or the marital status, gender, or sexual orientation of their parents.

Most importantly, the CPA will safeguard children's interests in stable relationships with loving parents. Children rely on nurturing and stable parental relationships in order to grow and develop into healthy adults. Separation from parents who have cared for them on a daily basis can have traumatizing and lasting effects on children's development. Under Connecticut law, parents who do not have a legally recognized relationship with their children lack standing to file for custody or visitation and could therefore be separated from those children at any time. The CPA will allow parents to formalize existing parent-child bonds and protect children's relationships with their parents.

A legal parent-child relationship provides children with benefits beyond physical custody and visitation with their parents. The existence of a legal relationship can also ensure that children are well-supported emotionally, psychologically, and financially. Legal parents can



have a say in important aspects of their children's lives, including where they go to school, what religion they practice, which doctor they see, or what extracurricular activities they do. Children benefit when parents who have reliably cared for them can have input in those decisions, which have a significant impact on their identity and well-being. Furthermore, a legal parent-child relationship allows children to access healthcare and other benefits from their parents, which would not be available to them otherwise.

Having represented many of Connecticut's most vulnerable children, we understand that a caring, reliable adult who is willing to advocate on a child's behalf can be the difference between a struggling child and a thriving one. Children who need services like learning accommodations or access to mental and behavioral health treatment can especially benefit from an adult advocate. This adult advocate will often be the child's parent. In settings like schools or hospitals, parents who do not have a legal relationship with their children cannot receive information about them or make decisions on their behalf. By closing the gaps in current Connecticut parentage law, the CPA will also empower parents to advocate for their children, ensuring that those children have a voice when they need it most.

Ultimately, the CPA will ensure protection and equality for all children and their families. On behalf of Connecticut's children, I urge the Committee to pass Proposed Bill No. 6321. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/
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