

Voices  
for Vermont's Children



## Testimony to the House Committee on Human Services

February 8, 2017

*Prepared by Amy Brady, Voices for Vermont's Children; also a foster parent in Vermont.*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Voices for Vermont's Children is an independent children's policy research non-profit. We advocate for policies that enhance the well-being of Vermont's kids, particularly our most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and youth.

Voices supports the overall intent of H.11. Foster parents and relative care givers have important information for Judges who make decisions about children's futures. Federal guidance has encouraged increasing foster parent participation in the court through the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and the Safe and Timely Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006.

We are concerned about the implication in the original draft of the bill that foster parents be given party status in CHINS proceedings. It's our understanding that Rep. Willhoit will be offering an amendment or alternate wording to clarify that party status will not be granted to foster parents. We strongly support this change, as it will keep the court's focus on the well-being of children.

Children served by the Family Services Division of DCF have to overcome the challenges that brought them into state care, as well as the myriad of life disruptions that come with being removed from their

home and sometimes their community. Best practices dictates the need to keep the court process child centered and for the process to be as clear and timely as possible. Foster parents hold current, accurate information due to their direct interactions with the child, and may provide useful insight about what may be in the best interest of the child in their care. Possible benefits of foster parents' participation include:

- The ability to hear first hand what is being presented and to offer relevant information prior to decisions being made;
- providing additional information to the Judge about the child's well-being while in foster care;
- providing timely and accurate information to the child in their care about changes in visitation when the child is not present in court;
- providing the child with additional support when the child is present in court.

Voices supports giving foster parents access to court as well as the right to respectfully request the right to be heard at hearings. I have included a link to a guide to Iowa's [\*Foster Parents and the Courts\*](#), which is one example of an approach that provides opportunities for foster parents to participate in the court process.

Thank you,

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