

State of Connecticut Sibling Bill of Rights

Preamble: The Department of Children and Families (DCF) recognizes the importance and value of sibling relationships. These rights are intended to guide the Department in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to permanency, safety and well being. This Bill of Rights is based on a similar Bill of Rights approved by New England Youth Coalition and the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors in January 2012, and was developed by the DCF's Youth Advisory Board with the support of the Department.

Whereas: the importance of sibling relationships are recognized and respected;

Whereas: sibling relationships provide needed continuity and stability during a child's placement;

Whereas: the sibling bond is unique and separate from the parent-child bond;

Whereas: siblings share similar history, heritage, culture and often biology that must be preserved;

Whereas: sibling separation is a significant and distinct loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact;

Whereas: every foster child deserves the right to know and be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives absent extraordinary circumstances.

Every foster child, absent extraordinary circumstances and pursuant to the provisions and exclusions of section 17a-10a of the General Statutes¹:

- 1) Shall be placed with siblings.
- 2) Shall be in close proximity to siblings if unable to be in same setting to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact.
- 3) Shall be afforded contact with siblings regardless of geographic barriers. The methods for contact should be outlined in the child's service plan.
- 4) Shall be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives and share celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations, and meaningful milestones.
- 5) Shall maintain consistent and regular contact that will be included in service planning.
- 6) Shall be included in permanency planning decisions relative to his/her siblings. Foster children should know what the expectations are for continued contact when a sibling is adopted or guardianed.
- 7) Shall be notified by DCF regarding a sibling's change of placement.
- 8) Shall be informed when a sibling is discharged from foster care. Alumni shall be allowed to maintain contact with a sibling who remains in state care.
- 9) Shall be supported by DCF in his/her efforts to maintain relationships with siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or guardianed. The Department shall facilitate such contact as appropriate.

10) Shall have predictable, regular contact with siblings that shall not be withheld as a behavioral consequence absent safety concerns.

Adopted by the DCF Youth Advisory Board, August 6, 2014

ⁱ § 17a-10a of the General Statutes provides:

(a) The Commissioner of Children and Families shall ensure that a child placed in the care and custody of the commissioner pursuant to an order of temporary custody or an order of commitment is provided visitation with such child's parents and siblings, unless otherwise ordered by the court.

(b) The commissioner shall ensure that such child's visits with his or her parents shall occur as frequently as reasonably possible, based upon consideration of the best interests of the child, including the age and developmental level of the child, and shall be sufficient in number and duration to ensure continuation of the relationship.

(c) If such child has an existing relationship with a sibling and is separated from such sibling as a result of intervention by the commissioner including, but not limited to, placement in a foster home or in the home of a relative, the commissioner shall, based upon consideration of the best interests of the child, ensure that such child has access to and visitation rights with such sibling throughout the duration of such placement. In determining the number, frequency and duration of sibling visits, the commissioner shall consider the best interests of each sibling, given each child's age and developmental level and the continuation of the sibling relationship. If the child and his or her sibling both reside within the state and within fifty miles of each other, the commissioner shall, within available appropriations, ensure that such child's visits with his or her sibling occur, on average, not less than once per week, unless the commissioner finds that the frequency of such visitation is not in the best interests of each sibling.

(d) The commissioner shall include in each child's plan of treatment information relating to the factors considered in making visitation determinations pursuant to this section. If the commissioner determines that such visits are not in the best interests of the child, that the occurrence of, on average, not less than one visit per week with his or her sibling is not in the best interests of each sibling, or that the number, frequency or duration of the visits requested by the child's attorney or guardian ad litem is not in the best interests of the child, the commissioner shall include the reasons for such determination in the child's plan of treatment.