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**Testimony in Support of:**

**HB No. 7172, An Act Reducing Educational Disruptions For Children And Youth In The Care Or Custody Of The Department Of Children And Families;**  
**HB No. 7174, An Act Concerning Education For Children For Whom The Department of Children and Families Is The Statutory Parent;**  
**S.J. No. 33, A Resolution Concerning Connecticut's Subsidized Guardianship Program; and**  
**HB No. 7037, AA Expanding the Subsidized Guardianship Program to Siblings of Children Living with Relative Caregivers.**

Testimony of Taly Bialostocki, Shelley Geballe, and Mary Glassman  
To the Select Committee on Children  
February 20, 2007

Senator Meyer, Representative McMahon, and the distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

We testify on behalf of Advocates for Connecticut's Children and Youth (ACCY), a statewide, independent, research-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policy making process that has such a great impact on their lives. ACCY is the sister lobbying organization of Connecticut Voices for Children, on whose behalf we also testify.

**We strongly support HB No. 7172, An Act Reducing Educational Disruptions For Children And Youth In The Care Or Custody Of The Department Of Children And Families and HB No. 7174 An Act Concerning Education For Children For Whom The Department of Children and Families Is The Statutory Parent, and we encourage all efforts to help foster youth maintain constancy in their educational placements.** Foster youth often face significant challenges to educational success, not least among them frequent school disruptions. Nationally, only about half of foster youth finish high school, compared to 70 percent of their peers, and only about 20 percent of foster youth attend college, compared to about 60 percent of their peers. Changes in a youth's placement commonly result in changes in his/her school that, in turn, often result in youth falling behind in their classes. Some research suggests that foster youth lose four to six months of educational progress with *each* change in school placement. Changing schools can leave children without an important source of stability, and school mobility can keep the youth from maintaining other relationships important to their success (teachers, coaches, peers).

**We strongly support S.J. 33, A Resolution Concerning Connecticut's Subsidized Guardianship Program and HB 7037, AA Expanding the Subsidized Guardianship Program to Siblings of Children Living with Relative Caregivers.** These bills would strengthen the subsidized guardianship program, which helps thousands of children and youth who have been in Connecticut's foster care system find permanent placements and maintain lifelong family relationships. For many children and youth for whom adoption is not an option, the subsidized guardianship program allows legal guardianship to be

transferred from the Department of Children and Families to a willing and able relative caregiver who receives financial support comparable to the support received by foster parents.

In 1997, through PA 97-272, the General Assembly took the bold step of creating Connecticut's subsidized guardianship program. Connecticut Voices for Children was very involved in the advocacy necessary to secure passage of this new legislation, understanding it to be an important tool to promote the well-being of some of our state's most vulnerable children and youth. The subsidized guardianship program now provides permanency to thousands of Connecticut children and youth who have been in our foster care system on account of parental abuse or neglect. In FY 06, DCF granted 308 subsidized guardianships (compared to 498 finalized adoptions). Unlike subsidized adoptions, for which DCF can receive federal reimbursement through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, subsidized guardianships are state funded.

**This placement option has proved invaluable for the many children and youth who cannot be returned to their parents' care and who have a relative willing and able to help.** For many of these children and youth, adoption is not an option; relative caregivers are not interested in terminating the parental rights of other relatives so they might adopt their children. Subsidized guardianship provides a somewhat similar permanency to adoption, and in the homes of caring relatives.

In the 10 years since passage of this landmark legislation, there have been efforts to broaden the scope of the subsidized guardianship program, including successful efforts to reduce the length of time a child must be in foster care to qualify for a subsidized guardianship and to create a kinship navigator system to help relative caregivers make wise choices. Less successful have been efforts to eliminate the need for placement in foster care in the first place (e.g., by providing subsidized guardianships to children who are at imminent risk of placement into foster care) and to expand the types of family relationships eligible for the program.

Again this Session, there are multiple bills to expand the subsidized guardianship program. The reasons that existed in 1997 have not diminished; indeed, they have grown more persuasive. The gap between the level of financial support provided a relative caregiver by the Department of Social Services through a Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) child-only grant and the foster care subsidy has grown with each passing year; the TFA grant has not be adjusted upward in more than a decade, while foster care rates are increased to help offset the impact of inflation. The number of children living with grandparents and other relatives has not diminished, while the research documenting the importance of children maintaining lifelong family ties has grown ever more persuasive.

**S.J. 33** would send a Resolution from the General Assembly to the United States Congress urging that Title IV-E funds also be available to reimburse subsidized guardianships as they are for foster care and subsidized adoptions. This was a change proposed by the Pew Commission on Foster Care and other expert commissions and advisory groups and merits Congressional enactment.

**HB 7037** would expand the family unit that could be considered eligible for subsidized guardianships by respecting the importance of sibling bonds to permanency. We would urge this Committee's support for this expansion as well.