



July 17, 2025

The Honorable Robyn Kennedy
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House Room 312-D
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Jay Livingstone
House Chair, Joint Committee on Children Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

Re: H.235/S.107, *An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care*

Dear Chair Kennedy and Chair Livingstone,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.235/S.107, *An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care* on behalf of the hundreds of children in foster care whom HopeWell supports every year. We strongly believe this bill will promote much-needed transparency and accountability to children experiencing foster care, ensuring they have all the services, resources and supports necessary to thrive while in out-of-home placement and beyond.

Historically, throughout the Commonwealth and across the nation, children and youth experiencing foster care have been excluded from conversations and decision-making regarding their child welfare experiences, despite being most proximal to the issues and realities of those experiences. In our current system, the unique needs, identities, and well-being of children and youth experiencing foster care are not centered. Children and youth experiencing foster care do not have a voice or a seat at the table; they don't have the opportunity to advocate for themselves or even have their rights acknowledged by those charged with their care. This bill, *An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care*, for the first time, attempts to change that.



This bill includes a number of provisions which will codify the rights of children experiencing foster care and provide clear expectations for the role the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has in centering and continuously prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of the children and youth placed in their care and custody.

Key rights afforded to children and youth as defined by this bill include:

- A right to information about their placement, including notification of any upcoming transitions.
- A right to a placement that will support their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, and religious identity and maintain connections necessary to preserve and promote their identities.
- A right to maintain their connection to family and siblings – via positive contacts such as visitations that are of a frequency and duration that is developmentally appropriate for the child.
- A right to stay in their school of origin and receive the educational support necessary to achieve their academic goals.
- A right to participate in extracurricular and enrichment activities based on their interests and passions.
- For older youth, a right to have their voices heard and participate in meetings related to their placement in foster care and their permanency goals.

We are especially grateful for the inclusion of an entire section regarding the rights of transition age youth who are aging out of DCF care. This population is particularly marginalized and codifying the expectations for communication, information sharing, and transition planning included in this bill will ensure youth who age out of care are aware of their options and the responsibility of the state to provide them with services and resources as they enter adulthood. This bill is an essential step towards improving both experiences and outcomes for children and youth involved in our child welfare system. Above all, the provisions included in this bill of rights give children experiencing foster care the right to be kids – experience the things other kids experience, access the resources other kids can access, and be treated with the love, respect, and support they deserve.

This bill was drafted by a coalition of diverse stakeholders, including youth with lived experience supported by our team at HopeWell. We strongly believe the inclusion of lived



expertise significantly strengthened the final version of this bill and were grateful for the opportunity for youth in our program to weigh in, have their voices heard, and have their feedback incorporated in the final bill. Our team's feedback was instrumental in shifting the language of the bill towards person-first language, a change that is reflected in the name of the bill and marks an important shift towards decreasing the dehumanization of children and youth experiencing foster care. We are thankful to Representative Michael Finn for his thoughtful inclusion of the voices of youth with lived experience in the process of drafting and reviewing this bill and encourage the committee to continue this important practice.

It is not lost on us that there are considerations that need to be explored when it comes to implementation of this bill. We are aware that DCF social workers are overburdened by high caseloads and other systemic issues. That said, concerns around implementation and DCF capacity should not be a barrier to doing the right thing. Our team strongly believes that children and youth entangled in our system shouldn't suffer because the adults of the system are shying away from doing hard things. Our sole focus should be on improving the experiences and outcomes of children and youth who are in our child welfare system through no fault of their own. Sometimes that is hard, but it being hard is not a reason not to do what's right. Passing this bill is doing what is right.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this testimony. Please do not hesitate to be in touch should you have any questions or want any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julie Segovia'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Julie' being more prominent than the last name 'Segovia'.

Julie Segovia
Chief Policy & Impact Officer
HopeWell, Inc.

CC: Senator Joanne Comerford
Representative Michael Finn