



Oral Testimony in Support of H.268 An Act to Keep Siblings Together in Foster Care

Good afternoon, Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy, and members of the committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill.

For many of us, including children experiencing foster care, our relationship with a sibling will be the longest relationship of our lives. There is significant research pointing to the benefits of placing siblings together in foster care. In the aftermath of a traumatic separation from a primary caregiver, sibling relationships have been shown to be a strong protective factor. When siblings are placed together, we see improved well-being and mental health outcomes, improved educational experiences, a drop in placement disruption and an increase in chances of reunification and adoption. On the other side, failure to maintain a sibling relationship has a significant negative impact on children, increasing the trauma of family separation, impacting children's identity formation, and depriving children from a vital source of comfort, familiarity, and support at a time of incredible adversity.

At HopeWell, we witness every day the impact that sibling separation has on a child's well-being. Let me tell you about 9-year-old Rae and her two sisters. All three girls are in foster care. Her two sisters are living together in the same placement, but Rae is not. Despite being in different placements, the three girls go to the same school. Through our RISE program, Rae receives high-dosage tutoring at school during her lunch break a couple times a week. After every tutoring session, Rae walks with her RISE tutor back to her classroom. She has learned that if she takes the long way back to her classroom, through the cafeteria, she can see her older sister Lucy who is at lunch. Rae's tutor witnesses every week the joy and excitement Rae feels every time she gets to say hi to her sister, and the happiness these short interactions bring to Rae.

I want to make it clear that, in some cases, there might be good reasons for siblings not to be placed together. In Rae's case, we don't know what led to her separation from her sisters, all we know is that this 9-year-old girl cares so deeply for her sister that she found a way to see her while at school, even if that is just for 5 minutes a couple times a week.



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This bill wouldn't stop DCF from separating siblings, but it would increase accountability to ensure that when siblings are separated, it is for reasons connected to the specific needs of the child and not to what is most convenient for the system. This bill asks us to shift to a pro-sibling stance that ensures we can trust that the system that separated Rae from her family is doing everything they possibly can to ensure that she has the ability to maintain a connection to her sisters, and that in instances when separation is necessary, Rae has the resources and supports she needs to support her wellbeing.

We owe it to Rae and every child experiencing foster care to pass this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill and I'm happy to answer any questions.