



DATE: February 28, 2018
TO: Committee on Children
FROM: Brunilda Ferraj, Director of Policy Research and Organizational Initiatives
RE: S.B. 892 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF YOUTHS PLACED IN OUT-OF-HOME SETTINGS LICENSED, ADMINISTERED AND INVESTIGATED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Linehan, Senator Kelly, Representative Green and distinguished members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Brunilda Ferraj, Director of Policy Research and Organizational Initiatives at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations. Nonprofits deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.B. 892 An Act Concerning the Safety and Well-Being of Youths Placed in Out-Of-Home Settings Licensed, Administered and Investigated by the Department of Children and Families.

DCF community group homes serve our state's most vulnerable children, those who have experienced trauma and neglect and are in the process of transitioning toward reunification with family, independent living or long-term foster care. Group homes are the alternative to warehousing children in large institutions. Community providers ensure that group homes are home-like residences that provide a physically, emotionally and psychologically safe environment for children in the community. This atmosphere allows children to reach appropriate developmental milestones and progress toward their goals while gaining the skills necessary to negotiate a healthy living environment.

The Alliance opposes SB 892 as drafted because it may create a vehicle for discrimination. We are opposed to any legislation that would create opportunities to violate an individual's rights to live freely in the community. This bill proposes to publish and make public information about children residing in group homes and other sensitive information regarding group homes which may be used to reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate stigma about youth in DCF care. While this information may be important to the families of children served by DCF, the bill's proposal to publish this information online is concerning as it would also make it available to anyone, regardless of their motivations or intentions.

Children living in group homes share the same rights as every other resident. The fact that they live in a group home, have been victims of abuse, neglect, or sex trafficking should not subject them to levels of public scrutiny that other citizens do not have to endure.

Group homes operated by community nonprofits are subject to rigorous data collection, licensing regulations, and quality management reviews by DCF. In addition to DCF licensing regulations, nonprofits must comply with detailed contractual obligations. Community providers have a track record of successfully providing and maintaining a high quality of life for both residents and their neighbors. Community nonprofits work closely with DCF to ensure that everyone residing in a group home has

appropriate support, and that staff decisions are made to assure that the individual is successful in the community and is receiving the appropriate level of supervision.

It is important to make the distinction between group homes operated by nonprofits and facilities run by the State. For example, the Albert J. Solnit Center's Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility is a state-operated facility that is not required to be licensed and is only inspected once every five years or when a serious incident is reported.

If the underlying intention of this bill is to resolve issues of transparency and information gathering for the purposes of improving outcomes for children or giving children and families the opportunity to be informed in decision-making, then **The Alliance and our members are willing to work in partnership with you, DCF, and other stakeholders to determine an appropriate process and framework for resolving these issues.**

Nonprofits strive to be good providers and neighbors, while upholding the privacy and other legal rights of individuals residing within their homes. We respectfully request the Committee not support this bill as it is currently written and would be happy to discuss any language changes you are considering with you further.

Thank you for your consideration.

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