

# Department of Children and Families



## SIBLING VISITATION

C.G.S. 17A-10A

## Sibling Visitation Legislative Update: 2023



### Background:

C.G.S. section 17a-10a requires that visitation with siblings of children placed in the care and custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) should occur no less than once per week unless it is not in the best interest of the child according to the assigned area office staff.

The statute also requires DCF to report on compliance with these requirements on an annual basis. DCF was not able to develop an automated report that calculates compliance with the statute because documentation of visitation plans, and best interest decisions concerning those plans, are done in qualitative text fields in our LINK case management system. Since case reviews are a labor-intensive process, a review process utilizing a random sample was selected, rather than reviewing all applicable cases. Random samples allow for a cautious generalization from the results to the population as a whole. The number of target children included in this review process has yielded results that are accurate with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and margins of error less than 9%. This means that if the current study found a 50% compliance rate, and if the study were conducted another 100 times, the percentage of compliance would range between 41 and 59 percent almost all (95 percent) of the time.

### Results:

The DCF Data Reporting and Evaluation unit conducted a study of 152 target children. The children were under the care and custody of the Commissioner of DCF for at least one week during SFY23 (7/1/22 - 6/30/23). Each child's visitation with the child's siblings (including adult siblings) was evaluated. Compliance with the statute was operationalized at the target child and sibling level, resulting in a measurement for 276 sibling pairs.

The following table displays the results for this review process since the second year it was conducted in 2017. Please note that evaluation of some of the sibling pairs was not possible/applicable because it was later determined that the sibling did not meet the criteria set forth by the statute or they were found to be in the population due to data entry errors. For these reasons the denominator for calculating compliance is seen in the column labeled "Evaluated Sibling Pairs." Also, please note that the confidence interval for all samples is 95%, while margins of error vary from year to year based on the change in Total Population and Total Target Children in the sample.

SFY	Total Children in DCF Care During SFY	Total Target Children in Sample	Margin of Error	Total Sibling Pairs	Evaluated Sibling Pairs	Sibling Pairs Meeting Visitation Expectation	Sibling Pairs with Documentation in Case Plan
2017	5,532	150	7.9%	300	290	147 (47.2%)	175 (58.3%)
2018	5,668	150	7.9%	332	320	126 (39.4%)	177 (53.3%)
2019	5,862	128	8.6%	269	252	120 (46.7%)	164 (62.1%)
2020	5,472	147	8.0%	286	286	112 (39.2%)	136 (47.6%)
2021	4,992	138	8.2%	270	146	82 (56.1%)	73 (50%)
2022	4,415	149	7.9%	286	210	136 (64.7%)	133 (63.3%)
2023	4,110	152	6.8%	267	250	175 (70.0%)	206 (82.4%)

### Barriers to Meeting Visitation Expectation:

The most common barrier throughout the years has been the siblings refusing to visit with one another. In many cases siblings may not have positive relationships therefore refuse to visit. Additional barriers include parents/guardians refusing to allow visitation or canceling/not attending visits. Many sibling visits occur during supervised visitation with parents, and if those visits are canceled, the siblings may not visit. It should be noted that some visits occur in more natural ways such as being facilitated by relatives or foster parents. The documentation for these visits may not be entered into the electronic record since they do not have access to the agency's current case management system.

### Conclusion:

There continue to be identified barriers in meeting the visitation expectations, though considerable improvements in performance have been observed over the last two years. Additional training and guidance regarding documentation would assist in presenting an accurate representation of the work that is being done. It is imperative for DCF to continue to ensure that children in care maintain a relationship with their siblings which is essential to their development and wellbeing. Thus, we continue to evaluate visitation of children in care and examine strategies to increase visitation.