



State of Connecticut
DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

Office of Chief Public Defender
55 Farmington Avenue, 8th Floor
Hartford, Connecticut 06105
(860) 509-6405 Telephone
(860) 509-6495 Fax

Deborah Del Prete Sullivan
Legal Counsel, Director
deborah.d.sullivan@pds.ct.gov

Testimony of Office of Chief Public Defender
Renee Cimino, Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection
Emily Leen, Deputy Assistant Public Defender

***H.B. 5270 - AN ACT EXTENDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION EXPENSES OF FOSTER YOUTH.***

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN- FEBRUARY 24, 2026

The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) supports H.B. 5270, *An Act Extending Financial Assistance for the Postsecondary Education Expenses of Foster Youth*. This legislation would codify existing Department of Children and Families (DCF) policy that permits certain youth postsecondary education financial assistance and extends the age of eligibility to receive such financial assistance from twenty-four to twenty-eight years of age.

The Division of Public Defender Services (DPDS) provides representation for children when abuse, neglect, and termination of parental rights petitions are filed by DCF. In this role, DPDS supports this legislation that allows youth who are committed to DCF and voluntarily remain in DCF services post majority to receive financial assistance for postsecondary education up to age twenty-eight.

Expanding postsecondary tuition assistance up to age twenty-eight will safeguard access to academic success for vulnerable youth who often face socioeconomic barriers, requiring a longer timeline to achieve stability and independence. These barriers can result in failure to meet attendance guidelines and/or to be identified for special education services.

A DPDS attorney formerly represented a foster youth client (client) who could be directly impacted by this proposed legislation. The client recently turned twenty-one and is currently enrolled in her second semester of college, where she studies Criminal Justice and hopes to one

day become a school resource officer. She is currently receiving funding from DCF for her education and student housing.

The client finished high school at twenty, two years later than originally planned, for a myriad of reasons: a house fire that resulted in two years of homelessness, mental health struggles surrounding her father's terminal illness that led to extended school absences, and a change of school that left her without many credits she thought she had already earned. Given this, she then did not start college until age twenty. Because she is working toward a four-year degree, she will turn twenty-four during her final year of college. Thus, without this proposed change, it is likely she would not receive funding for her final semester of college. This legislation could be life-changing for this client by ensuring her ability to finish her degree.

Thank you for your consideration of OCPD's position on this bill. This office remains available to discuss further and requests that this bill be voted favorably out of the Committee.