

Senator Maher, Representative Paris, and esteemed members of the Children's Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you today. My name is Kate Mazzotta, and I am the legislative and policy intern with the Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative. I am here on behalf of the organization testifying in support of Senate Bill 461 An Act Promoting Equitable Access to Higher Education for Children Under the Guardianship of Grandparents or Other Relatives and for House Bill 6182 An Act Extending Financial Assistance for the Postsecondary Education Expenses of Foster Youth. I have submitted written testimony so I will be summarizing and will be happy to take any questions at the end.

On SB 461:

- According to DCF the reported percentage of children in the state placed with kin is approximately 43%, compared to the national average of about 33%
- However, our general statutes state a guardianship subsidy may be offered to those in kinship care to achieve a postsecondary education only until the recipient reaches the age of 21, but those in non-subsidized care do not receive any subsidies to attend postsecondary institutions
- There many reports and studies stating children with an incarcerated parent are most likely to be placed in kinship care when their parent is arrested, but the issue of mass incarceration disproportionately affects low-income communities
 - Meaning families taking on kinship care have less room for economic mobility
- S.B. 461 gives children in kinship care who are also impacted by parental incarceration to be set up for success along with their peers when it has been proven they have the same academic capabilities as their peers

On HB 6182

- There have been multiple studies which prove being a product of parental incarceration and the foster care system, separately, negatively affects school readiness in youth
- The trauma of parental incarceration combined with the trauma of foster care could take years to heal, meaning those impacted by both parental incarceration and the foster care system could be well into adulthood before they have the mental capacity to attend college

- Currently, Federal Workforce programs allow out-of-school youth up until the age of 24 with some programs extending to the age of 26¹. Raising the age of DCF financial assistance for postsecondary education would be on par with federal trends
- Extending the age range for financial assistance for foster care youth attending a postsecondary institution from 23 to 28 gives those who have been the most impacted by the carceral and child welfare systems more of a chance to positively interact with society and have the room for economic mobility

Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative strongly urges the Committee to move these bills forward to help Connecticut's foster youth who have also been impacted by the carceral system. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and as I stated before I would be happy to answer any questions.