

**Testimony to the Human Services Committee & the Select Committee on Children
State of Connecticut**

Thursday, December 18, 2008

Eileen Bronko
34 Fairfield Court
Naugatuck, CT 06770

Distinguished members of the Human Services Committee and the Select Committee on Children, I am grateful to be here today to speak to you about one eight year old little boy who, at such a young age was suddenly thrust into a system where there was no woman to call Mom, no father to run to and no familiar family face to see. His name is Zachary and I am his Auntie I.

In August of this year my sister experienced a very difficult time that resulted in my nephew being placed into a therapeutic foster home in Pennsylvania. On that August evening, Zachary sat in a hospital room expecting to go back home with his Mom. He never realized that he would not go home, would be taken by people that where strangers to him and brought to a home with a family he'd never met. He didn't have his comfort blanket, his special stuffed animal, his favorite toys, his own pajama's or his own toothbrush and pillow. Since that night, Zachary has been denied any physical or telephone contact with his parents or family members except for one supervised telephone call to his 9 year old brother on his 8th birthday in November. There were no birthday presents or cards allowed from family members, and we have not been told why. I am Auntie I and I cannot even comfort him. I cannot imagine the level of trauma that Zachary has experienced.

Within days after Zachary's foster care placement my husband and I asked the Pennsylvania youth services to become a relative foster family for Zachary. We were told that the Interstate Compact paperwork was extensive and multi-layered. As Auntie I, I have been helpless to speed up the process for Zachary. I learned that the Interstate Compact paperwork was sent to the Hartford Connecticut office at least two months ago and then referred to the Waterbury DCF office over one month ago. The next approval process will take a minimum of five weeks before the placement may be approved. In the meantime, the foster mother has asked for a new placement for my nephew. This will mean addition trauma for him. Suddenly I feel like Zachary became a faceless mountain of paperwork that needs to be moved from one spot to the next.

I am Auntie I and I am here as a family member and an advocate for my eight year old nephew. It is vital that potential relative foster placements be encouraged and processed in a timely manner including family members going through the Interstate Compact process. We need to be educated and included in the child's plan of support services particularly those with psychiatric needs.

Thank you for you time and the opportunity to address the committees