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STATEMENT OF INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE

This case concerns the fundamental liberty interest of a parent and two children to family integrity. As such it concerns the core legal interests at stake in child protection proceedings. An interpretation of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children that requires children to remain in stranger foster homes or congregate care for extended periods of time when a fit parent is ready, willing, and able to take custody and care for them is antithetical to the constitutional rights of families and the well-being of children.

Amici have considerable experience and professional expertise in the field of child protection law and intimately understand the importance of clarifying the laws that govern reunification, or placement of abused and neglected children with their families. Collectively the *amici* have represented, advocated for, or served the interests of thousands of abused, neglected and at-risk youth. The *amici* possess significant knowledge and experience about the needs and legal rights of abused and neglected children in Connecticut. The *amici* also possess significant knowledge and experience regarding the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, having practiced in major metropolitan areas around the United States, including several that, like much of Connecticut's metropolitan areas, straddle state borders.

ARGUMENT

Applying the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to parents violates the reciprocal constitutional rights of parents and children to family integrity. It also violates the plain terms of the statutory language and undermines the courts' authority to protect parties' fundamental constitutional rights and serve children's best interests.¹

I. APPLYING THE INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN TO PARENTS VIOLATES CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES.

a. The Constitution protects parents' and children's rights to family integrity.

The Constitution protects the right to family integrity, and the United States Supreme Court and this Court have described that right in unusually strong language. Parents' right to the "care, custody, and control of their children . . . is perhaps the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests recognized by this Court." *Troxel v Granville*, 530 U.S. 57, 65 (2000). Those rights are matters of "intrinsic human rights." *Smith v. Org. of Foster Families*, 431 U.S. 816, 845 (1977). "[T]he family entity is the core foundation of modern civilization. The constitutionally protected interest of parents to raise their children without interference undeniably warrants deference and, absent a powerful countervailing interest, protection of the greatest possible magnitude." *In re Jeisean M.*, 270 Conn. 382, 395 (2004) (quotation and citation omitted). One need not belabor the point; the constitutional right to family integrity has been established and repeatedly reaffirmed "beyond the need for multiple citation." *Lassiter v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 452 U.S. 18, 27 (1981).

This Court has repeatedly held that children and parents hold reciprocal rights, "inextricably intertwined" with each other. *In re Melody L.*, 290 Conn. 131, 156-57 (Conn.

¹ This brief for the *amici curiae* was written without assistance from counsel to any party in this action. Neither the parties nor their counsel made any monetary contribution to the preparation or submission of this brief.

2009); *see also In re Christina M.*, 280 Conn. 474, 482-83 (Conn. 2006) (parents' rights "cannot be separated" from children's desires and interests); *In re Juvenile Appeal (83-D)*, 189 Conn. 276, 284 (Conn. 1983) (children have an interest in family relationships).

As a seminal child welfare work explained, protecting children's right to live with fit parents "is to safeguard each child's need for continuity." Joseph Goldstein *et al.*, *The Best Interests of the Child: The Least Detrimental Alternative* 7 (1996 ed.). Forcible separation from parents traumatizes children, and separations which may seem relatively brief to adults are intolerably long to children. Goldstein, *et al.* at 41-45. The Supreme Court has so recognized, writing that "children suffer from uncertainty and dislocation" during temporary separations. *Stanley v. Illinois* 405 U.S. 645, 647 (1972).

b. *Applying the ICPC to parents violates parents' and children's substantive and procedural due process rights.*

A core constitutional rule protecting children's and parents' right to family integrity was established in *Stanley v Illinois*. In *Stanley*, state officials presumed that an unwed father was unfit and separated his children from him without alleging or proving that he was unfit. The Supreme Court declared this action unconstitutional, writing, "We conclude that, as a matter of due process of law, Stanley was entitled to a hearing on his fitness as a parent before his children were taken from him." *Stanley*, 405 U.S. at 649. Just as Illinois violated the rights of Peter Stanley and his children, applying the ICPC to parents violates families' substantive and procedural due process rights.

Substantively, the ICPC's application caused the state to place the children in an institution for more than two months while the ICPC referral was pending rather than with their parent who was ready, willing, and able to raise them. Moreover, resolving that referral required consideration of an "interests of the child" standard, without any threshold

consideration of parental fitness. Conn. Stat. § 17a-175, art. III(d). Considering a parent's fitness is essential because the Constitution mandates a presumption that children's interests are the same as their parents – unless and until the state proves the parent unfit. *Santosky v Kramer*, 455 U.S. 745, 760 (1982). An evaluation of “interests” involves a set of subjective considerations – like the size of a home – that are irrelevant to the parent's fitness. Vivek Sankaran, *Out of State and Out of Luck: the Treatment of Non-Custodial Parents Under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children*, 25 Yale L. & Pol'y Rev. 63, 69 (2006); see, e.g., *In re D.F.-M.*, 236 P.3d 961, 967 (Wash. 2010) (rejecting as “nonsense” an ICPC decision based on the number of bedrooms in a parent's home). A state may only consider such factors, if at all, when it rebuts the constitutionally mandatory presumption that a fit parent acts in the best interest of his children. *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. at 68 (citing *Parham v. J.R.*, 442 U.S. 584, 602 (1979)).

Procedurally, applying the ICPC to parents violates due process in several ways. First, it separates children from parents without *first* establishing parental unfitness – violating *Stanley's* instruction to provide parents with “a hearing on their fitness *before* their children are removed from their custody.” 405 U.S. at 649 (emphasis added).

Second, applying the ICPC to parents shifts the burden of proof regarding parental fitness off of the state. The state bears the burden of proving that a parent is unfit and foster care is necessary. *In re Juvenile Appeal (83-D)*, 189 Conn. at 295. But by applying the ICPC to a parent, the state shifts the burden to the parent to prove that parental custody is not contrary to a child's “interests” before he can obtain custody.

Third, applying the ICPC to parents deprives children and parents of the right to seek timely judicial resolution of parental fitness. Parents and children may have cpirt

hearings – but, if the ICPC applies, the court is powerless to order parental custody unless the receiving state issues a positive ICPC decision. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-175, art. III(d) Any such hearing, therefore, avoids any discussion of the parent’s fitness. In the case at bar, the trial court hearings focused on the ICPC’s application to the father, not whether the state could establish concerns about the father’s fitness. Relatedly, applying the ICPC to parents risks erroneous deprivation of children’s and parents’ right to family integrity because neither children nor parents may seek judicial review of an adverse finding by a receiving state executive official; there is no appeal of the receiving state agency placement assessment.² If the receiving state ultimately disapproves the parent, the only options available would be for the parent to request that the Department of Children and Families resubmit the study or to move to another state. This concern is not hypothetical; Connecticut data show nearly 250 parents were denied custody of their children via the ICPC process, without a judicial finding of unfitness. Brief of the Appellant, A-11.

This usurpation of judicial authority illustrates how applying the ICPC to parents undermines the state’s administrative goals. The state’s interest in accurate decisions is thwarted by the inability to test receiving states’ judgments whether living with a parent serves a child’s interests via the adversarial method. The state’s interest in timely judicial procedures to determine an appropriate child custody decision is thwarted when ICPC referrals take a long time to be resolved. In the present case, the court had to wait more than two months before releasing the children to their fit father’s custody – something that should have occurred at the temporary custody hearing. The record reveals 150 cases

² Pennsylvania regulations addressing the Compact do not provide for an administrative hearing to review the assessment decision, and the Compact precludes home state judicial appeal. 55 Pa. Code §§ 3130.41, 3140.21, 3140.134, 3680.15. Even if Pennsylvania regulations did provide an appeal, that would be of no use to a parent living in other states.

between 2005 and 2010 in which receiving state ICPC authorities took more than 100 days to resolve ICPC referrals. Brief of Appellant, A-12 - A-34.

c. *These constitutional rights fully apply to a non-resident parent.*

Well-established constitutional law makes clear that the above-described rights apply to children and parents regardless of any individual's state of residence. Besides a parent's fitness, the only factors that affect a parent's rights were established in a series of Supreme Court cases regarding unwed fathers. Constitutionally, a biological father has "an opportunity that no other male possesses to develop a relationship with his offspring. If he grasps that opportunity and accepts some measure of responsibility for the child's future, he may enjoy the blessings of the parent-child relationship." *Lehr v. Roberson*, 463 U.S. 248, 262 (1983). There can be no serious question on how *Lehr* applies to the father in this case; he took care of the children during the summers and had frequent telephone contact with them. Nothing in the Constitution or in the Supreme Court's case law suggests any cause to grant the father anything less than the full panoply of constitutional rights.

d. *A constitutional process exists to protect children from unfit nonresident parents.*

Amici share the state's concern for protecting Connecticut children from unfit parents, whether those parents reside in Connecticut or other states. The proper method for achieving this goal is to follow Connecticut statutes which were crafted to respect the constitutional principles discussed above. The state can file a petition alleging that a parent has abused, neglected, or abandoned a child, outline facts supporting such an allegation, and request an order of temporary custody to protect the child. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-129. When the state removes a child from one parent and the other parent requests custody, the state can obtain basic background information on that parent which can inform

its decision whether to take these actions – including criminal background checks, and a search of criminal or civil cases involving the non-resident parent.³ Social workers and attorneys may interview and visit the parent, and the state may determine if a nonresident parent has abandoned his or her children or is unfit. In the case at bar, the father and his partner had a criminal background, and the state was aware of this fact. But the state filed no petition alleging that this background rendered the father unfit or parental custody harmful to the children, nor made any claim that this background necessitated an order of temporary custody for the children’s protection. Without any such allegation, the father should have been considered a fit parent fully entitled to custody of his children, and his children were fully entitled to live with their fit father.

Beyond these well-established constitutional and statutory procedures, the state has no cognizable interest in protecting children from parents who are neither alleged nor proven to be unfit. The public policy of Connecticut is to protect children from “injury and neglect,” which are not risked by a fit parent’s custody; to “strengthen the family,” which is achieved by placing children with, not separating them from, fit parents; providing for alternative placement only “when necessary,” as is not the case when a fit parent seeks custody; and to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect and “provi[de] services, where needed” to families, which is unnecessary when a fit parent has had no involvement in abuse or neglect. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-101(a). As the Supreme Court explained in *Stanley*: “What is the state interest in separating children from fathers without a hearing designed to determine whether the father is unfit in a particular disputed case? We

³ In the case at bar, state officials could have searched for any court cases involving the father in Pennsylvania’s appellate courts, criminal courts of common pleas, magisterial district courts, and the Philadelphia Municipal Court. See “Public Web Docket Sheets” at <http://ujportal.pacourts.us> (last visited 28 Oct. 2011).

observe that the State registers no gain towards its declared goals when it separates children from the custody of fit parents. Indeed, if [he] is a fit father, the State spites its own articulated goals when it needlessly separates him from his family.” 405 U.S. at 652-53.

II. THESE CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES STRENGTHEN STATUTORY ARGUMENTS AGAINST APPLYING THE ICPC TO PARENTS.

The upshot of the constitutional principles discussed above is a sharp distinction between a child living with a parent and a child living in foster care; the latter can only be considered after the state has established parental unfitness. The state’s proposed interpretation of the ICPC’s statutory language – which would define “foster care” as including parental custody and would impose financial responsibility for a child living with a parent on the state – is particularly implausible in light of this constitutional context. That context is essential to interpreting the ICPC’s statutory text. See *Ramos v Town of Vernon*, 254 Conn. 799, 816 (Conn. 2000) (“[W]e read legislation to avoid, rather than raise, constitutional challenges.”).

The state relies on the purported regulation⁴ written by the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children which would define “foster care” as including “24-hour-a-day care . . . provided by the child’s parent(s) by reason of a court-ordered placement.” Brief of Petitioner-Appellee before the Appellate Court of the State of Connecticut, at 18-19; AAICPC “Regulation Number 3” ¶ 4(26),

⁴ *Amici* uses the term “purported” because it is not clear that the document cited by the state is properly considered a regulation. No Connecticut agency has promulgated “Regulation Number 3” consistent with the Connecticut Uniform Administrative Procedures Act. Conn. Gen. Stat. tit. 4, ch. 54. Those requirements apply “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of the general statutes to the contrary in existence on July 1, 1989.” Conn. Gen. Stat. § 4-185(b). Connecticut adopted the ICPC in 1967. 1967, P.A. 178, § 1. The New Hampshire Supreme Court found “Regulation Number 3” of “no effect” because it “was not promulgated pursuant to our statutes governing the adoption of regulations.” See *In re Alexis O.*, 959 A.2d 176, 184 (N.H. 2008).

available at <http://icpc.aphsa.org/Home/regulations.asp>.⁵ The state’s argument hinges on this redefinition of “foster care”; unless “foster care” is understood to include parental custody, the ICPC cannot apply to parents because Article III(a) expressly limits its scope:

Prior to sending, bringing, or causing any child to be sent or brought into a receiving state *for placement in foster care or as a preliminary to a possible adoption*, the sending agency shall furnish the appropriate public authorities in the receiving state written notice of the intention to send, bring, or place the child in the receiving state.

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-175 (emphasis added). But, consistent with the Constitution, federal and state law distinguish “foster care” from parental care or custody. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines “foster care” as “24-hour *substitute care* for children placed *away from their parents or guardians . . .*” 45 C.F.R. § 1355.20 (emphasis added). Connecticut regulations are similar: foster care occurs only when “parents . . . are out of the home.” Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 17b-4(a)-1(f)(8). These definitions mirror those found in both legal and lay dictionaries. Black’s Law Dictionary 727 (9th ed. 2009); Webster’s Third International Dictionary 897 (1993).

The Constitution draws another sharp distinction that cannot be reconciled with applying the ICPC to parents. A parent’s right to custody of children is “coupled with the high duty” to raise the child. *Pierce v Soc’y of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 535 (1925). That duty includes the duty to support a child. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-215. Only placement in foster care away from parental custody shifts that financial responsibility to the state, in the form of “foster care payments” from the state to the foster family to take care of the child. Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 17b-749-01(23); 42 U.S.C. § 672; 45 C.F.R. § 1355.20. But Article

⁵ “Regulation Number 3” offers a definition of “foster care” which includes this sentence: “If 24-hour-a-day care is provided by the child’s parent(s) by reason of a court-ordered placement (and not by virtue of the parent-child relationship), the care is foster care.”

V of the ICPC provides, with no exceptions, that a sending agency “shall continue to have financial responsibility for support and maintenance of the child.” Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a-175, art. V(a). As the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit and later courts reasoned, applying the ICPC to parents would require superseding parents’ duty to support or violating Article V. *McComb v. Wambaugh*, 934 F.2d 474, 480 (3d Cir. 1991); *In re D.F.-M.*, 236 P.3d at 966; *In re Johnny S.*, 47 Cal. Rptr. 2d 94, 100 (Cal. Ct. App. 1995).

It is no coincidence that courts which have considered the constitutional rights of parents and children have convincingly concluded that the ICPC does not apply to parents.⁶ The only federal appellate case on the subject explained the ICPC’s inapplicability to parents as “consistent with the limited circumstances that justify a state’s interference with family life,” citing two Supreme Court cases on the subject. *McComb*, 934 F.2d at 481 (citing *Moore v. City of East Cleveland*, 431 U.S. 494 (1977) and *Santosky v. Kramer*, 455 U.S. 745 (1982)). Judge Bishop’s dissenting opinion below relies on similar language in *McComb*. *In re Emoni W.*, 21 A.3d 524, 534 (Conn. App. 2011) (quoting *McComb*, 934 F.2d at 480-81), cert granted, 302 Conn. 917 (2011). Other cases which explicitly consider or evoke the constitutional context reach the same conclusion. *In re A.X.W.*, 2011 Mich. App. LEXIS 983, *19-*21 (Mich. App. 2011) (discussing the constitutional “Guiding Principles”);⁷ *In re Alexis O.*, 959 A.2d 176, 183 (N.H. 2008) (“Biological and adoptive parents have a fundamental liberty interest”); *State v. K.F.*, 803 A.2d 721, 727-28 (N.J. Sup. Ct. App. Div. 2002) (citing *McComb*, 934 F.2d at 481);

⁶ The Compact’s plain language, even without explicit consideration of the Constitution, leads to the same result, as multiple courts beyond those discussed above have held. *E.g. In re C.B.*, 2010 Cal. App. LEXIS 1673 (Cal. Ct. App. 2010); *In re D.F.-M.*, 236 P.3d 961 (Wash. 2010); *Ark. Dep’t of Human Servs. v. Huff*, 65 S.W.3d 880 (Ark. 2002).

⁷ *In re A.X.W.* is unpublished, but citable as non-binding precedent in Michigan. 2011 Mich. App. LEXIS 983, *1.

Tara S. v. Superior Court, 13 Cal. App. 4th 1834, 1839 (Cal. App. 1993) (“Brian is the noncustodial nonoffending parent and absent good cause has every right to custody of Brianna.”). In contrast, cases that have found the ICPC applicable to parents have avoided any mention of the Constitution. *E.g. Green v. Div. of Fam. Servs.*, 864 A.2d 921 (Del. 2004); *State v. Leonardo*, 22 P.3d 513 (Ariz. Ct. App. 2001); *D.S.S. v. Clay Co. Dep’t of Human. Res.*, 755 So. 2d 584, 590 (Ala. Ct. of Civ. App. 1999).

CONCLUSION

Following the lower court’s application of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children to a fit parent, that parent “suffer[ed] from the deprivation of his children and the children suffer[ed] from uncertainty and dislocation,” living in state custody for over two months. *Stanley*, 405 U.S. at 647. This action violated the father’s and the children’s substantive due process right to family integrity, and their procedural due process right to a judicial hearing at which the state would bear the burden of proving the father unfit before separating the children from him. It also violated the Compact’s plain language – language made even more plain by the constitutional context in which it must be analyzed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Perra Rapillo
Office of the Chief Public Defender
30 Trinity Street, Fourth Floor
Hartford, CT 06106
TEL. (860) 509-6472
FAX. (860) 509-6495
christine.rapillo@jud.ct.gov

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Christine Rapillo, do hereby certify this 10th day of November, 2011, pursuant to Connecticut Rules of Appellate Procedure § 62-7, that a copy of this brief for Amici Curiae has been mailed, postage prepaid, to all counsel of record in this appeal as follows:

Tammy Nguyen
Assistant Attorney General
MacKenzie Hall
110 Sherman Street
Hartford CT 06105
Counsel for Department of Children and Families

Michael Miller
Southeastern Center for Juvenile Justice
132 Boston Post Road
East Lyme, CT 06333
Counsel for the Minor Children

Peter Catania
216 Broad Street, Suite 201
New London, CT 06320
Counsel for Respondent Mother

Don M. Hodgdon
88 Howard Street, Suite C
New London, CT 06320
Counsel for Respondent Father

Honorable John C. Driscoll
Superior Court for Juvenile Matters
978 Hartford Turnpike
Waterford, CT 06385